SPIRITUAL RENEWAL: A MODEL FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION

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ABSTRACT

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The context is Christ Family Church in Cary, North Carolina. The noted contextual problem is the church has become spiritually stagnant, plateauing, and affecting the spiritual health and growth of the members and the church. The hypothesis was that members participating in an eight-week spiritual renewal intensive through the spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement (preaching, teaching, reading), and service (mission) would result in the participants being spiritually renewed, which would lead to church revitalization. This qualitative research project used several methods for data collection which were, pre- and post-surveys, journal entries, group discussions, and exit interviews.

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The Doctor of Minister project has changed and challenged my life and ministry in many ways. It has caused me to take an introspective look at how I am developing and preparing myself to continue to serve God's people in a more relevant and effective way.

I would like to begin by thanking first and foremost my loving and supportive wife. Thank you for your overwhelming support and encouragement in helping me to get through this doctoral program. You have been the constant wind beneath my wings. To my children, Maya, Patrick, Christa, and Joi for your support and encouragement.

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Finally, and most importantly I want to thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Where would I be if it were not for the Lord? God has kept me in my right mind and given me the strength I needed to run this race and finish! To God Be the Glory!

DEDICATION

To Mia, my faithful wife, and our beautiful children: Maya, James, Christa, Joi, and our son in love, Jaylen. To my memory of loving and Blessed parents Lester Elmore and Myronne Jocelyne Wilson. To My Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I dedicate this Dissertation to all of you. It is a testament to your love, sacrifice, and support for me.

INTRODUCTION

According to "Leadership Journal," "over 340,000 churches are in desperate need of church revitalization. Not every church needs radical transformation, but most need a transformation. The natural question is, who wants a stagnant church? The obvious answer is Nobody! Yet, the truth is that most churches will not make the adjustments and changes necessary to move from spiritual stagnation and decline to revitalization and growth. Doing the same things, the same way will not revitalize them."[1]

My context is Christ Family Church, located in Cary, North Carolina. Christ family church has been in existence for twenty-four years and has had some level of health and success, but over the last few years, it has become spiritually stagnant, plateaued, and in need of revitalization. We have particularly seen a decline in Wednesday night prayer, Bible study, and service (evangelism) participation. This lack of participation affects the spiritual health and growth of members, which in turn affects the health and growth of the church and its ministry. The church currently has two hundred members on the roll. During the pre-COVID-19 pandemic, between 125 to 155 parishioners, on average, attended regularly. Post-COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen, on average, between 100-125 parishioners attend regularly. The church's membership is African American. It is led by myself, a full-time pastor, and my wife, who is the full-time choir and music director. She also serves as the church administrator. There is an

[1] Ed Stetzer, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2007), 18.

Elders Board and deacon's ministry that assists with the care of the membership. Our ministry servants' team of volunteers serves the Sunday-to-Sunday ministries. The church provides ministry to all ages and stages, from nursery to senior ministry.

It is apparent that churches desiring a comeback (revitalization) need to make changes to come alive again and start growing again. Whether those changes occur through rekindling Jesus' mission for the church, mobilizing the laity, focusing on leadership development, engaging in more strategic prayer efforts, increasing evangelistic emphasis, or making other needed changes, business as usual will continue to produce the same slow or no growth environment that plagues many churches.

I believe that a new disciple model using the spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement (Bible preaching/teaching/reading), and service (outreach/evangelism) can position the people to experience spiritual renewal, which leads to a healthier church (revitalization). The members will embody this health by actively engaging and committing to these spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement (Bible preaching/teaching, reading), and service (evangelism/outreach) efforts.

The theme of this project is "Spiritual Renewal: A Model for Church Revitalization." Spiritual health is an important part of a church's effectiveness and growth. Spiritual health can be seen in the members' desire to practice and participate in prayer, preaching (biblical engagement), and acts of service (evangelism/missions). When practiced, these disciplines help to bring life to a church.

Often, churches that have been in existence for some years can experience stagnation spiritually, which often affects the church's mission and effectiveness. Therefore, making it a church that has become stagnant, plateaued, and in need of

revitalization, coming alive again. This revitalization calls for a church to seek new, fresh discipleship models that can help to facilitate and produce change. This change must happen internally (spiritually) first before we can experience it externally in the church!

This project examines some of the common causes of spiritual stagnation in churches and the need for spiritual renewal while proposing a new discipleship model using the spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement (Bible preaching, teaching, reading), and acts of service (evangelism/outreach). My context reveals that after years of effective ministry, a church can begin to become comfortable with its success and, therefore, overlook the need for change, which often results in stagnation, a plateaued church. “Spiritual Renewal, a Model for Church Revitalization” is a result of my passion for developing an effective model of ministry through prayer, biblical engagement (preaching/teaching, reading), and acts of service that would help the church and other ministries come alive again and avoid stagnation.

The biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundation chapters helped provide a foundation for the Project Analysis. Each chapter was discussed during the weekly project interactive discussion sessions. The project participants read and discussed sections from each chapter, asking them to identify if and where they saw intersections between the foundational chapters and the project.

The biblical chapter (chapter two) served as the starting point for scriptural support of the project's focus on renewal. The biblical text for this project, Ezekiel 37:1-14 provides insight and inspiration to churches that have experienced stagnation (dry bones) and need renewal, a coming alive again! This biblical text is relevant to the project because it exposes the gravity of stagnation (dry bones) but also offers encouragement to

the leader (Ezekiel) and congregation (Exiled Israel) in need of renewal. By reviewing the text and the valley experience of Ezekiel, today's leaders and church can see how God can take something dead and, through God's spirit, bring it back to life.

Just as God spoke to the nation of Israel concerning their dead state and God's desire to revive these dry bones (Israel), this passage (Ez. 37:1-14) is relevant for the church today and speaks directly to a church that may be stagnant, dying, and in need of change. These passages can provide a vision of what God desires to do with a church and congregation that may be spiritually dead and in need of life.

The historical chapter (three) examined the figure of William Seymore, and the era of the Azusa Street revival provided a vision for the spiritual renewal that the church today needs to experience, a coming alive again! The historical study of the era of the Azusa Street revival and the person of William J. Seymour and other leaders of the Pentecostal Movement gives the project on revitalization and underpinning and foundation upon which to stand. Just as the Azusa Street Revival sparked a sense of renewal that impacted preachers, church leaders, missionaries, and churches, this same outpouring of God's presence (the Holy Spirit) is available for today's church. The church of today, just like the church of Azusa, can and must experience a revival and outpouring of the Holy Spirit that will bring about the change that dying, declining, and stagnant churches need. Just as Seymour sought God and prayed, which helped open the door for an outpouring of God's spirit, we must also be willing to make the same sacrifices and pursue God if we are to experience revitalization, "a coming alive again," in the church.

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The theological chapter (four) focused on the Holy Spirit's role in revitalization. The Holy Spirit is a major agent and plays a primary role in revitalization. Church leaders must cooperate with the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit works in and through us to bring about spiritual renewal. The Holy Spirit empowers the church, its leaders, and its members to facilitate revitalization.

Church leaders and movements can be and often are gifts of the Holy Spirit through which the Holy Spirit works to encourage and correct the church as she goes on her way. Yet they are not themselves the Holy Spirit. Jason Vickers notes that ecclesial structures are gifts of the Holy in and through which the Spirit works to incorporate us into the Trinitarian life of God. Yet ecclesial structures are not themselves the Holy Spirit. In and of themselves, they do not have the power to breathe new life into the church. Rather, it simply means that we need to be on guard against our tendency to forget that the ultimate resource for revitalization is not our structures but the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

A key aspect of experiencing renewal and revitalization in the church is change. We must be open to change. The interdisciplinary chapter (five) on organizational change theory helps to convey to organizations and churches alike that change is a necessity for growth. Change is an inescapable part of all our lives. "Companies that cannot change in this unique environment cannot play in the new economy. Companies that want to prosper over the long term need to practice the art of continuous change. This is equally

true of not-for-profit organizations, clubs, institutions, and yes, even churches."[2] The truth is that change is non-negotiable for the Christian Church in need of revitalization.

Organizational change is a theory that lies at the foundation of successful organizations and churches in search of change. Many Christian congregations in America who desire life-giving transformation have attempted to adjust, but their efforts often run into resistance or produce marginal results. When this happens, they may conclude that we cannot change, so they just settle and become comfortable while trying to make the best of it. There is good news! God is still eager and able to recreate, renew, and revive both people and congregations.

[2] Hans Finzel, *Change is Like a Slinky: Thirty Strategies for Promoting and Surviving Change in Your Organization* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2004), 72.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Introduction

I am Patricio Wilson, the youngest son of Lester and Myronne Wilson, who raised five children, i.e., three boys and two girls. I am the husband of Mia Yvette Johnson-Wilson who serves with me in ministry, and we have four beautiful children who are twenty-eight, twenty-six, twenty-four, and fifteen years old. I am the senior pastor of Christ Family Church in Cary, North Carolina. I started the church as a church plant in June of 1999, and we will be celebrating twenty-four years of pastoral ministry and thirty-six years of licensed ministry in June of 2023.

I can remember the excitement of seeing the bright New York City lights as we flew into John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York from my birthplace in Aruba. My father was relocating the family (my mother, myself, and my four siblings) to the United States for better education, jobs, and opportunities, and to reconnect my mother with her siblings and family. As I look back at this move that my father made for the betterment of his family, I noticed that it was my first example of what leadership and love of family looked like.

We moved to Perth Amboy, New Jersey, where my father bought a house and raised his family. This became the city where I attended school from kindergarten through high school, received my first communion, attended church, gave my life to the

Lord, graduated from high school, graduated from college, received my license to preach, worked full-time in ministry, received my ordination, purchased my first home, raised three of my four children, set out to plant a church and buried my mother!

You get the picture: if my father had not been the leader or the "Joseph" that he was, these significant life and ministry events may have not happened or may have been much different. My father may not have known it then, but he was raising a leader in the making!

Who would have known that God, in God's providence, would have relocated and planted my parents in this small city, where I would experience significant personal and spiritual transformational moments during my formative and young adult years? The leadership move of my parents to this country and city became the launching pad for my call to ministry and the beginning of my ministry and professional development.

Throughout my life from childhood to adulthood, God used what I call "God connections" (people and events) in my life to be a conduit of my personal, spiritual, and ministry formation. From my childhood years of having my first communion in the Catholic church, I developed and led college ministry, moved from graduating from seminary to being ordained, to serving on the pastoral staff, planting a church, and serving as the senior pastor today. Each of these life and ministry experiences helped to prepare and provide me with the ministry skills to serve in these leadership roles.

As I think of my life and spiritual journey, I can see God's hand leading, guiding, and preparing me for leadership in His church. Throughout my life, God has placed people, places, and things in my life to help me grow personally and spiritually. These people included not only the biological parents who gave birth to me but also my spiritual

parents, Bishop Hilliard, and Bishop Lockett, who gave me spiritual life and ministry opportunities. It has all led me to the space that I am in today. Ever learning, ever-growing in my walk and my work for God.

In June of 2022, I celebrated twenty-three years in pastoral ministry and thirty-five years in ministry. I just turned fifty-six years old, have been married for thirty-one years, and have three of four children grown on their own. In this season, my mind and heart are looking forward personally and pastorally. I am thinking more about church revitalization and creating new administrative and organizational structures and systems that need to be in place to transition the church to new leadership and ministry systems. The goal is for the ministry to become more efficient, gain momentum, grow, and not diminish and die.

In this chapter, I will seek to describe how my spiritual interests, ministerial skills, and experiences, along with my ministry context, will produce the basis and foundation for my Doctor of Ministry project. My love of helping people and doing ministry along with the leadership and ministry skills that I have developed has prepared me for the ministry context that I serve. This information was summarized in my autobiography provided in the introduction of this chapter.

In each season of my life, there has been a clear thread of God putting me in positions of working with and leading people. From my teenage years through my adult and professional ministry years, I had the privilege of being able to help, direct, and oversee groups of people. Those skills were sharpened even more as I developed, directed, and served youth and college students in our youth and young adult ministry.

My ministry interests in helping, empowering, and building people, and my pastoral and leadership skills over the years, have given me the ability to be able to discern the needs of our context as well as seek to provide a solution to the need. These life and ministry experiences along with research will form the basis for a Doctor of Ministry Project.

My project will look at a church that has become stagnant/stuck and needs revitalization in its structure and systems. It has done well in ministry but needs revitalization in its management to experience future progress and growth. I believe that if we can get both ministry and management working in tandem by creating a new administrative and organizational structure, it can promote efficiency, progress, and growth.

The project will address the need for revitalization, particularly in church administration, organizational structure, and leadership to provide new models and methods that will help, the church to create and maintain momentum, efficiency, and growth after the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID) pandemic. I hope that this project will be something that can promote the efficiency, effectiveness, and progress of Christ Family Church, and provide a blueprint or roadmap to help other churches that are stuck and need revitalization.

Context

Christ Family Church is located at 760 Reedy Creek Road, Cary North Carolina. Christ Family Church is a Christ-Centered, biblically-based Christian Church. Christ

Family Church began as a church plant in June 1999. The vision of Christ Family Church is to evangelize, educate, and empower people for the glory of God.

Through evangelism we seek to teach the congregation to evangelize by first living their lives as outward witnesses to the people they encounter daily. Our evangelism takes place through the vehicle of our missions and outreach ministries which seek to serve our community's needs. We educate and disciple through the various teaching ministries of our church. The primary teaching ministries take place during our pastoral Bible study and Sunday morning worship service. We also provide teaching through our small group ministries to youth, men, women, couples, and seniors. We take people through our economic empowerment ministry, which provides workshops, mentorship programs, and counseling in the areas of money management, health and wellness, homeownership, and life skills, among others. We also provide firsthand assistance through our benevolent ministry which assists in providing relief to those needing temporary financial assistance.

At the heart and foundation of Christ Family Church is its intentional focus on being a biblically based teaching ministry that focuses on spiritual growth, discipleship, and family. This intentional focus on spiritual growth, discipleship, and family ministry help to fuel the overall vision of Christ Family Church. It is this focus that has helped to develop ministries that reach all ages from childhood to adulthood.

Several important and noteworthy events took place that helped to shape and establish Christ Family Church. Our first initial startup weekend services helped to confirm to us and validate to others that God was with us and would be with us as we

began this new church plant. The services were held in the heart of the city at the Cary Community Center in Cary, North Carolina.

Secondly, we purchased our own 10,000 ft building on six acres of land only after three years of existence. In addition to purchasing the building, we received and raised financial donations to complete the total renovation needed to move in within the one year. We had the church dedication and first service in our newly renovated building only four years after our church plant.

Thirdly, in just two short years, the Lord provided another opportunity for us to expand the vision and purchase a house on five acres of land. We renovated the house and property and partnered with a local organization that housed homeless single-parent mothers. The house and land were called "The Mercy House." It was a display of God's mercy to those in need. This house became a vehicle that allowed us to serve our community and fulfill our vision to empower and uplift. It gave us immense joy to see how God would bless an African American church with land, a building, and a house in a city where Black people did not get an equal opportunity to purchase land.

In the 1950s, Clyde Evans, Sr., an African American male, began selling parcels of land in Cary, North Carolina along Evans Road (named for his family) to other Black families when no one else would sell them land. His father Charles Evans bought land in Cary as early as the 1880s. Clyde's grandsons developed several subdivisions, including Evans Estates, in the 1990s.[1]

We were on the right track as an African American church purchasing land to empower our people and the community, particularly in a town that was Caucasian. Upon

[1] C. Carmichael, "Cary Through the Years," The Friends of Page-Walker and Town of Cary, friendsofthepagewalker.org.

contemplation, we no longer use the house for its original purpose of outreach and to bring about empowerment to the church and the community. Through revitalization, we need to go back to the original purpose and vision of the church and reimagine a ministerial use for the "Mercy House."

Our present ministry context is articulated by looking at the overall vision of Christ "Family Church to Evangelize, Educate, and Empower." Currently, the church has approximately two hundred members. After the COVID-19 pandemic, on average 125 people including children now attend church in person and an estimated twenty-five to thirty online. The church membership is made up primarily of African Americans. Christ Family Church is led by a full-time senior pastor, Bishop Patricio Wilson, with Minister Mia Wilson serving as the full-time music, choir director, and church executive administrator. Oversight of the church is also provided by the Board of Elders who assist the senior pastor. There is a ministry of deacons that also assists the pastor and helps to care for and serve the needs of the membership. Our ministry servants' team of volunteers serves in the various Sunday-to-Sunday ministries of the church. Despite having a small leadership team, we have been successful in growing and developing our ministry to where it is today.

Even with some level of success, I have realized that, after twenty-three years of ministry, our weakness or problem area is that we have become stuck and stagnant. The car is running but in neutral. We have done ministry right; however, in this season our overall management of the ministry needs to be assessed. We need revitalization in the areas of administrative and organizational structure, with renewed systems and processes

that will help to push the ministry forward and prepare it for future growth. Honestly, this should have been addressed about five years ago.

We have been successful in evangelizing by preaching the gospel, and in our outreach activities. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen people respond to the gospel, come to Christ, and join the church. Our weakness or problem area even before the COVID- pandemic was that we did not excel in our job of being creative and consistent in developing a culture of evangelism which, in turn, responds by reaching out to people of all cultures. This may speak to why our numbers have plateaued over the years to an average of about 150 members. This is the case if most of the visitors and members we attract are African American, and the Black resident population in Cary is much lower than other groups.

Our most successful outreach was our outdoor harvest festival and fun day which drew parents and children of all ages and across diverse cultures. The event was held at a neutral site, i.e., a middle school field, not a church, and drew in residents from the area. It seems like outreach events with a youth and family focus may open a wonderful opportunity for us to reach more people, particularly those of diverse cultures.

The strength of our church is to educate. Paul said in II Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness."[2] Our church does an excellent job at teaching and educating our congregation in scripture beginning with Sunday morning worship and Wednesday evening Bible study. There are also youth and children's classes that fulfill our vision to educate youth, ranging from nursery to senior high. We have also done well educating

[2] Biblical citations are from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted, 2 Timothy 3:26.

our adults through our small group classes for couples, singles, seniors, men, women, and young adults.

Our weakness is that we were not consistent in thinking of creative ways to connect and reach our college students and the young adult group as well as those at our college campuses. From current research and demographic reports, we identified this as a highly educated area with major schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries. Since this is a highly educated area, we must be intentional about providing sound theological and biblically-based classes, seminars, webinars, and sermons, that cover and address a variety of subjects that speak to real-life experiences from a biblical worldview.

It could also mean acquiring educated professionals that are well-versed in the subjects that we need to cover. This may also mean partnering with universities or seminaries to utilize their professors or students in a teaching capacity. We may also need to review our process of how we equip our lay leaders or ministers that feel a call to instruct young people and adults.

Our empowerment ministry has been in place to equip and empower the church's members and the community. Our successes in this area have been our yearly community book bag and school supply donation in which we partner with local programs to assist children and families in need. Our College Empowerment Sunday raises funds for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Our breast cancer awareness weekend hosts walks, and informational seminars, and raises funds for breast cancer research and support. Our food donation drives provide food for our local food pantries and serve the community at local shelters. Indeed, we have had some success in these areas of empowerment. However, we need to review and be more creative and intentional

about identifying the greatest need in our local community. This may mean having to hire staff whose main responsibility is community engagement. They need to identify and connect the church with local community ministries and organizations with whom we can partner in meeting needs that are specific to the community of Cary and the surrounding area. Our church will need to take a close look at the need to review and replace its old structures and systems to bring about revitalization.

Ministry Journey

After graduating from seminary, I was offered a full-time staff position at my home, church as a youth minister. I oversaw and developed the teen ministry of Cathedral International Church in Perth Amboy, New Jersey. This was a ministry of over 1,500 members. This ministerial opportunity turned out to be the beginning of one of the best ministry and leadership learning experiences.

I started in this ministry just by building relationships with the teens. It helped that I already knew some of the teens since I had worked with them while doing my ministry field work in seminary. My first order of business was to also develop a volunteer adult youth leadership team that assisted me with the teen ministry. We soon had several volunteers added to the team, and we were well on our way.

This beginning season of teen ministry taught me the importance of building effective relationships with teens, parents, and volunteers. It seemed like my wife, and I became spiritual parent figures in the life of these teens. We developed a strong teaching model with the teens and incorporated events that again built relationships. As the teen

ministry grew my responsibilities grew to now becoming the youth pastor and taking on Sunday congregational responsibilities.

This now meant oversight over the whole youth ministry of the church with added counseling and preaching responsibilities. I had to coordinate bringing together and giving administrative oversight to all youth and children's ministries spanning from nursery to high school. This transition of role and responsibility opened the door for me to get even more pastoral and practical ministry experience and mentorship from my senior pastor and the pastoral staff. I am convinced that God used this as an opportunity to prepare me for future pastoral leadership.

My responsibilities to my family during this season grew as well. I needed to learn and practice the important lesson of ministry balance and boundaries. This was important since pastors and leaders have lost their families and have been ineffective leaders in their homes. One reason for this was that they placed more value and put more time into the church family than they did their own.

Doors of opportunity and training continued to open as I was selected by my senior pastor for ordination by the American Baptist Churches. This was a wonderful experience that God used to stretch and strengthen my faith. It gave me a chance to reflect upon my faith formation. The process was a year-long journey during which we met with the assistant pastor for instruction and reflection.

We culminated the process with a final paper on the foundations of our faith, biblical doctrine, our theology of God, and our faith journey. After reviewing and evaluating our papers, we sat before church members and leaders of the American Baptist churches to answer and defend any questions they had about our papers. This was another

experience that pushed me to think critically about my faith and enabled me to defend my Christian values and convictions. This was a transformative experience God used to prepare me for future pastoral ministry.

After ordination, I felt a greater sense of affirmation and authority to conduct the ministry responsibilities and assignments given to me with confidence. Ministry momentum was picking up. My pastoral responsibilities on the pastoral staff also increased particularly with preaching, teaching, and leading the liturgy during worship. In addition, I was responsible for presiding over multiple worship services. It was like God was preparing me for future ministry at a very accelerated pace.

At this point, we had developed the overall youth ministry from the nursery ministry to the college student ministry along with a fully staffed summer program. My role moved to more of an oversight and training position, than that of everyday and weekly teaching and directing of the youth ministry. I had to attend weekly pastoral staff meetings for instruction and strategic planning. It is amazing since I felt that simultaneously as God was growing and developing the youth ministry, God was also growing and developing me as a Christian young man, husband, father, and leader.

Change Is Good: A New Season

As I entered my eighth year as a staff member, I felt a change in my life and ministry on the horizon. My desire and drive for the role of youth pastor were slowly diminishing. I remember telling my senior pastor that if I stayed in my current role, I would not be as productive, and that the ministry would not grow or blossom. I would just be maintaining and not creating movement. I was sensing a change in the wind; a

different season of ministry was approaching. I no longer felt that I could be fruitful in my current role. I was feeling that a change was needed, and I also felt the desire to move. After praying and fasting, I felt the need to move and plant a church in Cary, North Carolina. On January 1st of 1999, my family and I moved with the blessing, support, and prayers of my senior pastor and home church.

This move brought with it a new and fresh zeal in my desire and pursuit of God and His will for my life. It was a season of maturation and growth for me personally as a husband, father, and eventually senior pastor. I was in my thirties, having been married for eight years, had three young children, and was moving away from the security of my family, my church, and the city where I grew up. This was one of the best things that happened to me because I had to grow up and handle responsibilities without these familiar crutches. God knew just what I needed in this new season of my life. Growth and maturation played intricate roles in my being able to balance my family life and the new church plant.

The process of planting a church was tough and tedious but rewarding work, nonetheless. If I were to do it again, I would have taken more time to prepare myself before the church plant. I would have read more material, attended conferences, and engaged in more conversations with church planters in preparation. This is an area that African American churches need to talk openly about and be more intentional about developing a process of preparation for ministers who feel a call to plant a church. I was so focused and faithful working where I was that I failed to invest in where I was going, (i.e., planting a church). I believe my lack of preparation on the management/administration side before planting the church, affected my lack of

administrative infrastructure when I first started the church. We were good on the ministry side of things but could have been better on the management side of things. But God's grace allowed me to make up some ground for the failure of prior preparation through the relationships and connections I developed in North Carolina. There was a lot that I learned as I did the work. In many respects, it was on-the-job training.

The church began seeing visitors, which turned into members, which turned into growth. After two years of ministry, we moved from the Cary Community Center where we were worshipping. The town of Cary was preparing to renovate the spaces in the community center, and we had to move. In hindsight, this was a God moment because I was getting comfortable with the location that we were in. It is easy to become comfortable in life and to live your life in cruise control. I believe the church had become comfortable and we were worshipping on cruise control.

It often happens in leadership that you can become complacent. God, in His infinite wisdom, forced us out due to future renovations. The Community Center needed us to move, which put pressure on us to start looking for another meeting space. I am so glad the town needed that space because it gave us the push we needed to change, move forward, and start thinking about growth. Sometimes, God will use various vehicles to provide the push and jumpstart that you need.

Several weeks after we moved, we found out that the community center would delay its renovation for several months. However, as I look back this move was good for us. It was simply God's push. The new location is where Christ Family Church is today after twenty-three years of ministry. We need that same push toward revitalization. This time it is not the vehicle of the community center that God is using, but this doctoral

program. Change and transition do not always feel good but are necessary for progress and growth.

It was a tedious and frustrating process for two months before we found a building and space. However, when we did, God opened yet another miraculous door. We found a building that was for lease, yet after meeting the owner, Mr. Tom Banks, he offered us a lease with an option to buy which we took. After two years, he came back to us and suggested financing with his bank which gave us the loan to purchase the building. Our congregation purchased a 10,000-square-foot building on ten acres of land. Within the same year, we found favor with one of the oldest African American banks to give us a line of credit to help finish the construction that was needed to convert the building into a sanctuary.

This was yet another connection whereby God allowed me to use Mr. Tom Banks as a vehicle for His plan for my life. I learned through that whole experience that when God pushes you (moving from the community center), God will provide for you because he is trying to bring you to a place of progress and growth. I thank the Lord for that push. My life and ministry journey has been filled with God connections that promote the realization of God's plan for my life and ministry. This process also gave me another opportunity for spiritual and pastoral growth. Through the building search and purchase process, I became a chief financial officer in negotiating the building and land purchase and the construction manager in finding and following up on the sub-contractors who did the work on the renovation.

It is amazing how God brought my college degree in business administration full circle. God even those college years to prepare me for the business side of the church.

That business degree which I thought was futile when I entered seminary, to the contrary, paid dividends today in my pastoral work. There was so much that I learned in the classroom of construction, which applied to the pastoral ministry that the classroom of seminary could not teach me.

I believe that our church may be at the point in its life cycle where we need to go back to some lessons and principles from that season of renovating: not renovating just the physical building, but the administrative and organizational structure of the church itself. We need revitalization in the hope that this revitalization will help jumpstart a new season of progress and growth.

Develop the Synergy

When I consider my spiritual journey and context, I can see how my spiritual journey, the context of the church, and my pastoral ministry come together to support the basis of my proposed project. My spiritual journey along with my church context has provided me with some of the necessary skills to help my church experience revitalization.

The topic that I intend to explore and bring to my context is spiritual renewal, which leads to church revitalization through the spiritual practices of Prayer, Biblical Engagement (preaching/teaching/daily reading), and Service (outreach). I believe that after twenty-three years, our context (our church) has become spiritually stagnant, stuck, plateaued, and in need of a spiritual push. When I think of my spiritual journey, ministerial skills, interest, and context coming together to serve the needs of this doctoral project, I think of several areas.

First, my relationship with God and my faith journey. I came to Christ and into the faith at an early age. My parents set the foundation and my pastor and home church helped to foster and develop that growth. At the age of sixteen, I came into a personal relationship with the Lord and continued to grow and be disciplined in my faith by my pastor throughout high school. This continued through college and into adulthood, and I am still growing. This background helps me to bring to the church and this project of spiritual renewal leading to revitalization the priority of faith and spirituality, which is the first area needed in the life of a pastor or leader when talking about revitalization.

Dr. Samuel Dewitt Proctor talks about the personal faith that sustained Black people through the harshness of slavery.

> Faith put steel in their spines to endure physical bondage, and zeal in their souls to prevail against evil; it illumined their minds to keep the vision of a better day and inspired their hearts to learn and embrace the great human conversation. Faith gave them a sense of eternity, a mystical transcendence that transposed their pain into song and their agony into a durable, resilient quest for complete humanity, the substance of things hoped for.[3]

Second are my leadership skills and interests. These will be important skills for the doctoral project because the project will need to go through analysis, testing, and implementation of different spiritual practices to evaluate its effectiveness. These spiritual practices cannot happen or be put in place without transformative leadership, leadership that gains the trust and confidence of the people and implements the change needed.

Through my ministry experiences, I have developed the ability to lead people of all ages and stages. The thread of leadership began when, as a young boy, I experienced

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[3] Samuel DeWitt Proctor, *The Substance of Things Hoped For: A Memoir of African-American Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), xxi.

my father moving his family to the United States, to a three-bedroom apartment in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, then to a two-family house that collected rent, to give us all better opportunities. The seasons of leadership development continued in my days of leading youth, from leading college students, adults, and staff as a senior pastor, to developing and leading pastors as a bishop. Each experience and season helped to provoke and develop my leadership skills. This doctoral project will need a leader that is experienced, open, and willing to facilitate change, transformation, and revitalization.

James MacGregor Burns speaks of transactional leadership in his book *Transforming Leadership*, saying:

> Of course behind the façade of war unity politicians conducted the same old transactional leadership. But it seemed clear to me that FDR, driven by the new situation, was following a governing strategy significantly different from that of the prewar years. It was not simply a souped-up version of transactional leadership. He boasted that he was shifting from the Dr. New Deal to Dr. Win-the-War. He and the war effort he conducted was fundamentally changing the country. He had become what his example inspired me to call a transforming leader, just as Lincoln had midway through the Civil War.[4]

Third, my extensive community relationships and experiences with people. My ability to reach and relate to all groups of people is another ministry skill and interest that can serve my context through this doctoral project. One of the reasons my father moved our family to the United States was to reunite the family and keep us close to the extended family (my mother's sisters). Thus, at an early age, I learned through my parents' example the importance of relationships and keeping those connections.

God has allowed me through my life and ministry experiences to follow, take instructions from, lead, and be on teams with many diverse types of people. From playing

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[4] James MacGregor Burns, *Transforming Leadership: A New Pursuit of Happiness* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 2003), 23.

sports with teammates to guiding college students as a dorm Resident Assistant, to working with youth, adults, and staff as a youth and senior pastor. I have seen and experienced many things pertaining to relationships with people. Admittedly, I am not the best at confrontation and correction, but I am good at loving, caring, and encouraging. I will need to be up to the challenge when facing situations that involve confrontation, but I know revitalization is worth it.

I understand that part of revitalization and change in a church is people. I have learned through years of ministry and pastoral training that people have different personalities, and one must learn how to deal with these different personalities to move a church, ministry, and organization forward. Therefore, relationships and people skills are important especially when introducing change. Henri Nouwen talks about the importance of communal and mutual respect in relationships as it pertains to ministers shepherding the flock.

Ministry is not only a communal experience but also a mutual experience. Jesus, speaking about his shepherding ministry, says, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for the sheep" (Jn. 10:14-15). As Jesus ministers, so he wants us to minister. He wants Peter to feed his sheep and care for them, not as "professionals" who know their client's problems and take care of them, but as vulnerable brothers and sisters who know and are known, who care and are cared for, who forgive and are being forgiven, who love and are being loved.[5]

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[5] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In The Name of Jesus: Reflections On Christian Leadership* (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 59-61.

The nature of this project is a process of evaluating, enhancing, and implementing the spiritual practices of Christ Family Church in hopes of bringing about revitalization. We will seek to focus on where we are now, where we want to go, and the process it will take to get there.

I am hoping that the doctoral project will open our eyes and give us insight into possibilities for revitalization in the ministry that could lead to more efficiency, progress, and spiritual growth. In his book *Built to Grow*, Sam Chand says,

> When we understand that size and speed depend on our systems and structures, we will pay closer attention to the way things operate and how people are empowered and valued. When we feel stuck, we will not just put our heads down and try harder, hoping for a different outcome. Of course, we will need tenacity and grit, but we will add wisdom, insight, and hope to our determination. The interplay of systems and structures creates and sustains the culture for good or ill. Systems must continually adapt to the needs and opportunities of the moment. Static systems gradually lose relevance, but dynamic systems anticipate evolving needs.[6]

[6] Sam Chad, *Built to Grow: Creating Systems and Structures To Turn Vision To Reality* (Atlanta, GA: NavPress Publishing Group, 2017), 12-14.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

"Can these dry bones live?" This is the question asked by God to Ezekiel, and it is the question of the moment. It is the question that I believe surrounds and supports the subject of church revitalization and renewal! Ezekiel's answer, "Lord God, only You know" (Ez. 37:3), is an answer that resonates with me and those that love and have a heart for church revitalization.

> God asks Ezekiel a pressing question that drives this whole Chapter and vision. God by His Spirit sets Ezekiel down in a valley of full of dry bones and asks, 'Son of man, can these bones live? Since God knows everything, He is not asking because He doesn't know the answer, but to make a point. The point is made in Ezekiel's response, 'O Lord God, you know'. We can understand Ezekiel's response as not just, 'God you know…' but an affirmation that only God knows and only God could make these dead, dry bones live. From this question and answer, God proves this dialogue to be true-God is the only one who can breathe life where there is no life. God through His word by His Spirit is the catalyst to bring this life.[1]

God's answer to Ezekiel concerning these dry bones is Yes, these bones can live! God's yes to Ezekiel is also a yes for today's church, which desires to see its dry bones, its church, revitalized.

Church leaders who desire revitalization must have more than just a desire, they must have a drive and a determination to not only start the process of spiritual renewal

[1] Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization: Solutions for Dying and Divided Churches* (Fearn, UK: Christian Focus Publications, 2021), 26.

but also see it through to the end. When Ezekiel, said yes to God, he is responding to the call and cost of being used by God to help bring about renewal to the dry bones of Israel. Leaders today love to respond to the call, but too often, when they start experiencing the cost (sacrifices) of revitalization, they become disheartened. So then, the question for the leader and congregation that desires to experience renewal is, are we ready to respond to the call and commit to the cost of revitalization?

Ezekiel chapter thirty-six clearly describes one of the greatest promises in the Old Testament. God promised His rebellious and hurting people, who were in exile, that a day would come when God would make a new covenant with them that would transform them from the inside out. As great as this promise was the question would be how would this get done? How would God fulfill and make good on the promise of restoration God made in chapter thirty-six? This is the very reason Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven is so important. The valley of the dry bones is one of the most well-known images in all of scripture, but its context, content, and placement makes it so powerful, as it explains how God says He will do what He promised. Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven shows us that God has the power to do the impossible, even raise the dead. Churches that need revitalization are no exception.

Some things are impossible for us as human beings to do in this life, but nothing is impossible with God. God's power is so great that He can do anything. The prophet Ezekiel reminds us of this great truth by revealing what only God in His great power can do. Arguably there is no clearer demonstration of God's life-giving power than in Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven. This same life-giving power that comes from God is the catalyst that sparks and sustains revitalization in the church. It is clear from this chapter and passage

that God and our willingness to acknowledge God, is the starting point for any church that desires to experience spiritual renewal and church revitalization.

When I speak of church revitalization in the context of Ezekiel 37:1-14, I am speaking of the process of leading a church through the spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement (preaching, teaching, reading), and service to a place of spiritual health. This process begins with God's presence, facilitated by God's prophet, (leader), and is sustained by God's people.

> According to the book of Ezekiel, God's people are in such a place of hopeless despair that only God and His power can do what we cannot. The point of this strategically placed chapter in Ezekiel is this: it is with this power that only comes from God that God can fulfill the promise of a new heart, a new spirit that dwells in His people, change them, cleanse them, and bring them back to life (Ezekiel 36). The same is true for dying churches.[2]

In this chapter, I will examine Ezekiel 37:1-14 in hopes that it will provide some biblical support for spiritual renewal leading to church revitalization. Several scholars divide Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven into two primary sections (vv. 1-14) and (vv. 15-28). Our primary focus, verses one through fourteen, can then be divided into two sub-units (vv. 1-4) and (vv. 5-14).

> The thread that runs through Ezekiel 34 to 38, described by Block as the gospel of hope according to Ezekiel, is its salvific principle. Yahweh would actualize this hope for Abraham's descendants because of his covenantal fidelity to mercy. Ezekiel 37, therefore, falls within the restoration section of this prophetic book. It is divided into two clear sections: the prophet's visionary experience of the valley of "Dry Bones," visualizing the dead state of Israel (vv.1-14), and the graphic eventual realization of postexilic reunification of the dispersed tribes of Judah and Israel (vv.15-28). Verses 1-14, are also divided into two literary sub-units: the introductory epilogue, presented in a prophetic reported speech formula (vv.1-4), and the divine speech, couched in the messenger formula (vv.5-14).[3]

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[2] Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 17.

[3] Joel Kamsen Tihitshak Biwul, "The Restoration of The Dry Bones In Ezekiel 37:1-14: An Exegetical And Theological Analysis," Scielo, http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2305-445X2019000100002.

As we look specifically at (vv.1-14), we will focus on several means that I believe God uses to bring life to and revitalize these dry bones (Israel). We will look at,

1. God's Presence (v.1). The hand of The Lord comes upon Ezekiel.
2. God's Prophet (vv.2-4, 7). Ezekiel's participation, proclamation, and prophecy to the problem of dry bones.
3. God's Word (v.4-6). Hear the word of the Lord.
4. God's Power (vv.7-9). God's Spirit breathes life into the dry bones (Israel).
5. God's People (v.10).
6. God's Promise (vv.11-14). God's commitment to performing what God promises.

Exegesis

The Book of Ezekiel is named for its author, Ezekiel (1:3; 24:24), a name that means "strengthened by God," which, indeed, he was for the prophetic ministry to which God called him (3:8,9). Ezekiel uses visions, prophecies, parables, signs, and symbols to claim and dramatize the message of God to His exiled people.

Ezekiel was from the Zadokite priestly tradition in Judah, exiled to Babylonia with King Jehoiachin and other Judahite nobles, and called to be a prophet to the Babylonian exiles. The extant literary text he left behind, includes him among the oral-literary prophets of Israel. Using oral oracles, visions, symbolic actions, and prophetic discourse as communicative modes.

> A variety of literary forms are used in the book of Ezekiel. There are funeral laments (19; 27; 28:11-19; 32:2-16), fables and allegories (15,16, 17, 23), visions (1:1-3:15; 8-11; 37:1-14; 40-48), symbolic actions (4:1-5:17; 12:1-20; 21:11-29; 24:1-27; 33:21-22; 37:15-28), historic-theological narrative (20); legal sayings (14:1-1; 18; 22:1-160), ritual and priestly regulations (43:18-27; 44:17-31; 45:18-

> 46:12), disputation oracles (33:1-20; 3:17-21), and many shorter forms, such as quotations, oaths, sayings, and proverbs. The prophet enlisted a panoply of literary genres to present his case effectively. Modern preachers most often use stories to illustrate their sermons; Ezekiel and the prophets more commonly used props as part of symbolic action.[4]

> The book of Ezekiel is situated among the latter Prophets in the Hebrew canon, one of the five books of the major prophets out of the seventeen Hebrew writing prophets in the Christian canon. Of these, the book of Ezekiel seems to be the most exciting. Ezekiel's call to be a prophet came at a crucial point in the history of covenantal Israel. It was a turbulent and threatening time as the city of Jerusalem, the cultural, religious, and economic center of Jewish life was at risk of demise at the hands of the Babylonians.[5]

Israel finds itself in a place of exile because of its sin and its failure to acknowledge God and turn from that sin. There would soon be a switch in Ezekiel's prophetic role from judging prophet to consoling prophet. Ezekiel looked for a new exodus, a return from exile, a new covenant, for the restoration of the community. The revival and restoration of the nation would be like the resurrection of the dead. Just like Ezekiel sought for renewal and restoration for his people, pastors today who desire revitalization and renewal for their spiritually stagnant and dead churches must seek God and get a vision for renewal and restoration of their congregations.

Leaders, here we find a critical key to renewal and revitalization. The leader must be willing to carve out the time needed to seek God and wait on a vision from God for renewal. Since God is the author and authority on renewal and restoration, we, the leaders, must get the authorization and the clearance to start down the runway of revitalization. If we get clearance from the control tower (God), we can then take off with

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[4] Raymond B. Dillard and Tremper Longman, III, *An Introduction To The Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), 324.

[5] Biwul, "The Restoration of The Dry Bones In Ezekiel 37:1-14: An Exegetical And Theological Analysis," Scielo, http://www.scielo.org.za/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S2305-445X2019000100002.

confidence knowing that what God started, God has the power through God's Ezekiel (the leader) to finish.

> The book of Ezekiel is intensely personal. We cannot but enter into the prophet's own experience of awe, fear, distress, revulsion, agony, and other emotions when reading it. One reason why this is so is that Ezekiel is the only prophetic book written entirely in the first person. We encounter Ezekiel's experience, not through a third-person narrator, but as he described it from his own mouth. The Prophet is addressed by God throughout the book as 'son of man' (as, for instance, in Ezekiel 2:1, 3, 6, 8; 4:1, 16; 5:1; 14;3, 1; 15:2; 16:2; 23:2, 36). This phrase means "person, human being" and emphasizes the humanity and frailty of the prophet, especially as it contrasts with the glory and power of the god whom Ezekiel saw in the visions.[6]

How powerful it is to see that God in his infinite power chooses to speak to and deal with Ezekiel personally, one on one. As a leader and prophet to the nation of Israel, this personal affirmation is critical to giving Ezekiel the confidence to face the challenge of speaking to and prophesying life to the dry bones of Israel. Ezekiel is a young man when he answers God's call and the vision of the dry bones. He was twenty-five when taken into captivity and according to Ezekiel 1:1 he was thirty when called into ministry. This was usually the time that priest began to serve in their office. This would turn out to be a very special year and time for Ezekiel. God took a young man, gave him a vision, and then used him to speak life to that which was once dead. This should send a clear lesson to leaders who desire renewal in their churches. God is not moved by age, God desires willing prophetic servants who will yield to God's call.

God's Presence (v. 1) - The Hand of the Lord

According to verse one, it states, "The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set down in the midst of the valley, and it

[6] Dillard and Longman III, *An Introduction to The Old Testament*, 324.

was full of bones." The introduction to the vision impressively describes the psychic experience of being caught up by supernatural power and being transported elsewhere. The language used evokes very ancient prophetic experiences and characterizes Ezekiel as an old-world prophet with authoritative credentials (cf. 1 Kings 18:12, 46; 2 Kings 2:16). Divine agency is indicated both by the pressure of God's Yahweh's 'hand' (cf. 1:3; 3:14, etc.) and by the participation of his 'spirit' (cf. 8:3; 11:1, 24).[7]

The restoration and revitalization of the dry bones of Israel begin and end with God's involvement with humanity (v. 1,14). At the foundation of any miraculous move of God, as with the restoration of Israel, God's presence ("The hand of the Lord") is present. This is also true when we speak of the revitalization of a church and its congregation. To experience the successful process of restoring spiritual health and life to the church (revitalization), it must begin with and be accompanied by God's presence ("The hand of the Lord"). Moses also understood the importance of God's presence going before you to accomplish God's work. Exodus 33:14-16 "And He said, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you "rest" (v. 15). "Then He said to Him 'If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here" (v. 16). "For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except you go with us?" Moses knew he was powerless against the strength of his enemies without the presence of God (the hand of God). "Seeking God's presence must be the top priority, and that begins with the pastor's walk with the Lord. Put God first, follow His lead, and then let Him be

[7] Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary Ezekiel 20-48* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1990), 184.

responsible for the results. It's His church, it's His work, and as much as you love it, He loves it even more."[8]

As the vision opens, Ezekiel finds that the hand of the Lord has transported him to a valley filled with dry, dead, disjointed bones (v. 1-2). These words (dry, dead, disjointed), not only speak to the condition of the dry bones of Israel but also characterize the condition of many churches in need of spiritual life/revitalization.

> Not since chapter 11 have we been told that Ezekiel was taken somewhere by the 'hand of the Lord' (37:1). The prophet is taken to a 'valley' to observe a gruesome sight: the unburied, skeletal remains of a fallen army. It is a depiction of Jerusalem after it falls to the Babylonians, and it comes at what must have been one of the lowest points in the recorded history of Israel. At such a point, God comes with a word of great encouragement to cheer the hearts of his despondent people. It is a vision in which the bones come to life through the intervention of his sovereign power. When things are at their lowest ebb, God intervenes with promises of hope, blessing, and revival.[9]

We not only see God's presence (The Hand of The Lord) involved in Ezekiel's vision, but we also see God's placement of Ezekiel in verse (v. 1). God places Ezekiel in a valley (a plain) of dry bones to see and feel the condition of Israel. Ezekiel had to be willing to be placed by God in the valley of the dry bones to see and prophetically speak to the condition of Israel. Revitalization can only come about when there is a pastor or leader that is willing to allow the spirit of God to call and place them in a valley of dry bones (their ministry context) to be a prophetic voice of restoration and revitalization. Ezekiel had no choice in the matter of where he would be placed and the ministry assignment he would be given.

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[8] Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live: A Practical Guide To Church Revitalization* (Athens, TN: ReClaimed Church Publishing, 2021), 10.

[9] Derek Thomas, *Ezekiel: God Strengthens* (Grand Rapids, MI: Evangelical Press, 2014), 291.

God's Prophet (v. 2-3)

Verse two states, "Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley, and indeed they were very dry." According to verse three, it states, "And he said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones, live?' So I answered, 'O, Lord God, You know.' Verse four informs us that "Again He said to me, Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!"

> The visionary scene, a gruesome one, is gradually unfolded. First impressions of a grotesque mass of bones are reinforced as the prophet is taken round the site; he is made aware too that what were once corpses had long since rotted or been eaten away into fleshless bones. The divine question is a standard element in a vision, to wrest significance from the sight (cf. Jer. 1:11, 13; Amos 7:8; 8:2; Zech 4:2, 5). It was a ridiculous question. A seeming corpse might be revived, but these pathetic piles of bones were hopelessly dead. Out of polite deference to his questioner the prophet leaves him to answer his own question. Yahweh knew the answer as well as he did.[10]

This vivid picture of the state of Israel is a reminder for leaders today that ministry to people can be messy. We often walk amid messy lives to see and speak life to the mess (corpses, dry bones) in the midst of which God has placed us in. There are times when a leader must face and address problems in the lives of the congregation in hopes that God will use them as an Ezekiel to help turn what seems like a mess into a miracle, dry bones into living bones! It is easy to draw a clear conclusion from this text that God's prophet (pastor) is a critical aspect of revitalization. Just as Ezekiel played a vital role in the resurrection and revitalization of the dry bones (Israel), so does the pastor play a vital role as God's prophet called to speak to the need for revitalization while proclaiming the word of God that brings life.

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[10] Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary Ezekiel,* 184.

What a privilege that God would even include Ezekiel in the process of restoration and ask him the question, "Can these bones live"? It is God that not only knows the answer but chooses to allow Ezekiel to participate in the miracle of bringing life to dead dry bones. We must recognize that as leaders it is a privilege for God to choose us to be conduits of change and bring about revitalization.

God's Word (vv. 4-6) Hear the Word of the Lord.

Verse four states, "Again He said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord!" Verse five states, "Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live." According to verse six, it states "I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live."

> Upon inspection, Ezekiel finds that the bones are "very dry." The Israelites had been in exile for over ten years and the vision is meant to signify that what hope they had once possessed is now gone. They were, like these bones, "very dry." It is a picture of deadness and desolation. The question is asked: Can these bones live? The answer is, of course, negative as far as any inherent power in the bones themselves is concerned. They are utterly dead and lifeless. Any possibility of life must come by the intervention of an outside force or agency, one who alone has the power to bestow life: that is, God himself.[11]

> Evidently, Yahweh knew more than Ezekiel did, for he commands the prophet to address the defunct bones around him and to announce their imminent reanimation. Yahweh is to do the impossible! The promise of reanimation is given twice, as a framework for reclothing of the bones with bodies made up of sinews, flesh, and skin. Yahweh is portrayed as the creator of the individual, the giver of personal life (cf. job 10:11-12; Ps 139:13-16), but now in a context of restoring life rather than initially bestowing it. The demonstration of such power would be proof indeed of Yahweh's being.[12]

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[11] Thomas, *Ezekiel: God Strengthens*, 292.

[12] Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary Ezekiel*, 185.

As we see in verse (v. 4-6), God invites Ezekiel to participate directly in the vision rather than simply observing it. He is to prophesy to the (very dry-bleached) bones and command them to reassemble themselves and clothe themselves with flesh. Notice in verse (v. 4) that even though it is Ezekiel's responsibility to speak on God's behalf, he must speak and declare the "Word of the Lord." That is because man's mere words have no power to transform. Only the word of God, not the words of a man, has the power to bring about transformation. When a pastor proclaims the word, Isaiah declares God's Word goes forward out of God's mouth through God's servant, and it shall not return void (empty) but will accomplish the things in which it was sent out to do (Is. 55:11).

> Like Ezekiel God gives pastors a vision for the transformation of their local church and the role they must play. He calls pastors to begin preaching life-giving messages that are used in the spiritual transformation of the people. Note in Ezekiel 37 that God raised up the prophet Ezekiel to speak God's words to the dry bones, to command them in the name of the Lord, "Live"! So also, God uses godly leaders to speak his words powerfully to a dying or dead church to make it come alive again. God commands us to rise up and "Revitalize."[13]

"Croft suggests, There is a balanced, biblical approach to the work of revitalization that is both more effective as well as more faithful to God's design for the local church. This method rests its full weight on the truth that God's spirit working through His Word is the only way to bring true lasting spiritual life to a local church."[14]

As leaders who desire to see renewal, there is a caution that we need to pay close attention to when it comes to the Word of God in revitalization. It is the danger of placing our work before the "Word" of God. Leaders, if not careful, can make the mistake of putting more value and priority on our works in ministry than we do on God's word.

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[13] Andrew M. Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys To Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 31.

[14] Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 27.

While our work to accomplish renewal is needed and valuable, it must never take precedence over the "Word of God." As we see in Ezekiel's experience, it is the "Word of the Lord" (v.4-6), not the works of Ezekiel, that has the power to transform dry bones. Therefore, let us who desire renewal take heed and guard against the tendency to put the work before the Word.

God's Power (vv. 7-9)

According to verse seven**,** "So I prophesied as I was commanded and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone." Verse eight states, "Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them."

The prophetic oracle in verse seven, triggers a movement from disorientation to reorientation. Ezekiel discharges his strange commission, and the ensuing silence is broken by a rattling sound as the bones realign themselves into skeletons. Then before his wondering eyes, they turn into bodies, in step with the stages of his oracle. First sound, then sight: Ezekiel's senses are bombarded with an overwhelming experience.[15]

When Ezekiel does what God commands, he experiences the power of God's spirit performing surgery right before his very eyes. The bones begin to arrange themselves in the proper order with a noise that shakes the valley, and then they arrange themselves with flesh. The prophet Ezekiel is then ordered to prophesy to the Spirit, which enters the bones and revives them. God displays to Ezekiel the power of his word

[15] Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ezekiel,* 185.

and the power of his obedience to God's word. It is his willingness and obedience to God's word that sets into motion the display of God's power through God's Spirit.

> As the footnote in the NIV observes, the Hebrew word ruakh ('breath' in the NIV of v.8) carries multiple meanings. It can mean simply "breath." So, to say that there was no ruakh in the bodies could simply mean that they were not breathing. Related to this meaning is the use of ruakh for 'wind' (as in 1:4 ad 37:9). In keeping with the invisible force of the wind and the life-giving power of the breath is a third meaning. Ruakh can also mean 'spirit' that is, the empowering, enlivening agency of persons (see 1:12, 20), and particularly of God (as in 36:26-27).[16]

Revitalization that is orchestrated by God involves the work of the Spirit. For the church to be revived, it will take a move of God's Spirit (God's Ruakh). Just following your specific ministry program is not enough to experience the power and presence God needed for revitalization. Our methodologies and programs do not always guarantee success. Pastors may desire to see their churches experience renewal and growth. Real growth will require more than just passion and programming. Real spiritual and numerical growth will require the power and presence of God. It will require the Spirit of God (the Ruakh of God). Church revitalization begins with laying the foundation of God's word as it is preached accompanied with the move of God's Spirit. The two must be closely linked together to see dry bones live and stagnant churches come alive again!

God's People (vv. 9-10).

According to verse nine, it states, "Also He said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live'." "This prophetic oracle

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[16] Steven Tuell, *New International Biblical Commentary: Ezekiel* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009), 252.

in verse nine is addressed to the 'breath" (spirit) that is out there in the wide world. Moreover, the oracle is not a statement of Yahweh's imminent action but a command to the spirit, unleashed to the four points of the compass, to come and focus its attention on the corpses."[17] The context of this word "breath" or inbreathing of the spirit here is similar to the creation in Genesis 2:7, 'the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed (blew) into his nostrils the breath of life (spirit of God), and the man became a living soul." This similar word can also be found in the creation story in Genesis 1:2, where the spirit (breath) of God was hovering over the earth. This same spirit of God that breathed over creation and into man and gave it life, gave those dry bones life!

Verse ten informs us by stating, "So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army." In verse ten, Ezekiel the prophet is ordered to prophesy to the Spirit, which enters the bones and reanimates them (vv.1-10; Gen. 2:7). Just as in an earlier vision, Ezekiel's prophetic word began the judgment and death of the people (Ez. 11:13), so now his word helps to restore the nation. Lastly, in verse ten the "breath" or spirit that was forecast in verse five is achieved. "The prophetic declaration of life for the dry bones against natural laws, rational human imagination, and common sense would resurrect and resuscitate the bodily forms into living humans described as a 'vast army' (Ezekiel 37:10)."[18]

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[17] Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary Ezekiel*, 185.

[18] Biwul, "The Restoration of The Dry Bones In Ezekiel 37:1-14: An Exegetical And Theological Analysis."

This is true revitalization, a coming alive again! The preacher or leader must be today's modern Ezekiel, who is willing to speak prophetically the word of God to the dry bones of the church in need of being renewed. The church that is stagnant, dead, and in need of revitalization needs the breath/spirit of God to breathe on them through the vehicle of God's word.

God's Promise Fulfilled (vv.11-14)

Verse eleven states, "Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off! Verse twelve informs us that, "Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel'." Verse thirteen states, "Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought up from your graves." Verse fourteen says, "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it, says the Lord."

After the description of the vision account in verses 1-10, an interpretation is provided in (verses11-14). It is important to read the interpretation carefully, for the nature of it is such that, if we are not careful, we will impose upon it a meaning not intended by the author. The people in exile had complained, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost' (verse 11). The collapse of Jerusalem had seemed to drive the nails into the coffin that was their exile; there was no more hope of return and new life in their homeland. But again, the prophet was commanded to speak: the graves of exile would be

opened (verse 13) and the people would return to their homeland with the gift of new life. The prophecy, in other words, is not concerned with any theology of the resurrection from the dead, and insight that is never clearly attained in the Old Testament period; rather, its focus is on the restoration of moribund exiles to new life in their original homeland.[19]

Some scholars differ in their theology of the resurrection and feel that this passage does open the door to thoughts of the resurrection. Most scholars agree that the main point of this passage and its meaning focuses on a people that God allows to experience renewal, a coming alive again, and the restoration of their homeland. However, most will agree that the focus of this passage and its interpretation points to people who will experience renewal and the restoration of their homeland!

> Although the interpretation in Ezekiel 37:11-14 seems to have originally understood the opening of Israel's graves as yet another literary image describing God's restoration of the exiles, later Jewish and Christian interpreters understood the image literally and saw in the passage a reference to the actual resurrection of the dead. The language in vv.12-13 is vague enough to support both interpretations, and the more literal interpretation may even have been in the mind of Ezekiel and his disciples (37:15-28).[20]

Summary

One recurring element we see in the visual narrative (vv.1-10) and reflected in the interpretation narrative (vv.11-14) is the prominent role played by Ezekiel, a willing agent of renewal. He is not merely an observer in this narrative, but an active participant in the revitalization of his people. Just as God desires to renew his people and needs a

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[19] Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1983), 260.

[20] James L. Mays, *Harper's Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1988), 691.

prophet, God desires to renew and revitalize his church and thus is calling for an Ezekiel who would be willing to actively participate.

Ezekiel was an active participant in the renewal and restoration process. The key word here is “active.” I am concerned that some leaders today say that they desire or need renewal for their churches but are more focused on the accolades from the ministry than on their “active” participation in facilitating renewal in the ministry. The accolades do not produce renewal; it is the active participation with God in the people's lives that produces renewal and restoration in the dry bones of the church.

Just as God spoke to the nation of Israel concerning their dead state and His desire to revive these dry bones (Israel), I believe this passage (Ez.37:1-14) is relevant for the church today and speaks directly to a church that may be stagnant, dying, and in need of revitalization. The bones that God gave life to, which were once dried up, hopeless, and dead, symbolize the whole house of Israel. These passages provide a vision of what God desires to do with his children and his church, one that may be spiritually dead and in need of life and revitalization.

This is why Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven is so important. The valley of dry bones is one of the most well-known images in all of scripture, but its content and placement make it especially powerful, as it explains how God says he will do what He promised (v. 14). It shows that God has the power to do the impossible, even raise the dead, and moribund churches are no exceptions. How does God revitalize a dying or dead church? A church is revitalized by the power of God through the Spirit of God at work through the word of God using a faithful shepherd of God. Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven reveals

that God is powerful enough to revive a dying church and to breathe life where there is none.

Faithful shepherds of God must be convinced that the God of Ezekiel can do the same for the church of today. God can breathe life where there is no life. Therefore, churches that have become stagnant and in need of revitalization are the perfect candidates to see and experience dry bones (members) coming alive again!

"Revitalize is a word that God speaks to the dry bones of a dead, weak, helpless, dying church. Both images come from the book of Ezekiel. In the case of a dead church, it is just as God did to the dry bones of the nation of Israel in Ezekiel 37:5. 'Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live."[21] This passage shows us that God desires renewal for his church and that God must be the priority and source of that renewal. Just like God was in the valley of the dry bones and breathed life into them, God and the word of God must be the priority in the process of church revitalization if there is to be new life. "There is a balanced, biblical approach to the work of revitalization that is both more effective as well as more faithful to God's design for the local church. This method rests its full weight on the truth that God's spirit working through His word is the only way to bring true lasting spiritual life to a local church."[22]

Through the life of Ezekiel, God speaks to the pastor (leadership) of the church regarding their involvement in the spiritual renewal of the people by preaching life-giving messages. Notice that God raises up and uses the prophet Ezekiel to speak God's word to

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[21] Davis, *Revitalize*, 30.

[22] Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 14.

the dry bones and to command them to live in the name of Jesus. This passage in Ezekiel is a constant reminder that God uses and encourages godly leadership today, to raise up and declare the word of God, which brings new life to a stagnant and dying church. The clarion call to pastors today is that God commands us to rise and revitalize!

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The Azusa Street Revival, William Seymour, and other leaders of the Pentecostal Movement were the sparks that God used to ignite a revival that has impacted Christians and the church for generations. This spark would play a critical role in what we now know today as the Azusa Street Revival led by William J. Seymour and other Pentecostal leaders.

> The twentieth-century Pentecostal/charismatic movement was born on the first day of this century, January 1, 1901, in Topeka, Kansas. For several months, the fledging faith slept like a babe in a crib. Then for a couple of years, she crawled around in Kansas, Missouri, and Texas. In April 1906, Pentecostalism stood to her feet in a dilapidated old mission at 312 Azusa Street in Los Angeles, California. Once standing, the movement swiftly ran around the world. Nearly one hundred years later she is still running as revival fires fall fresh on a hungry church. The church must never forget what happened at 312 Azusa Street. Although the United States is experiencing a revival, many would argue that we have seen nothing that equals the power of the Azusa Meeting and the impact it had on the world. The church must pray for a fresh outpouring for a new millennium.[1]

The impact that Seymour and the Azusa Street revival made continues to speak today to the church that desires to experience spiritual renewal in their context. It gives us a vivid picture of what can happen when a community of faith that is hungry for renewal comes together with one purpose to pursue and experience more of the power and presence of

[1] Larry Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour and a History of the Azusa Street Revival* (Duncan, OK: Christian Life Books, 1999), 11.

God! It is this similar experience (the outpouring of the Holy Spirit), that I am hoping my project on Spiritual Renewal leading to Church Revitalization will have.

> On the morning of April 19th, 1906, readers of the Los Angeles Times were shocked to read the banner headline news of the San Francisco earthquake. At 5:18 a.m. the day before, the most powerful earthquake in American history, 8.3 on the Richter scale, had destroyed 514 city blocks in the heart of the city, and more than 700 people died from the tremor and the firestorm that followed. The day before, on April 18th, readers of the same paper had seen a curious first-page story of a spiritual earthquake that had hit Los Angeles in a little mission church on Azusa Street the night before. Little did the readers know that the aftershocks of the Los Angeles event in a small black holiness church would continue to shake the world with even greater force throughout the century.[2]

The Azusa Street Revival transformed and impacted people's lives and caused spiritual and numerical growth in the churches. It brought about what we would call today a spiritual renewal and revitalization in the people and the church leaders that came to experience it. The lasting effects of this revival was felt among the clergy, church, community, and country.

Clergy and church leaders must be at the forefront of revival. How can the church experience renewal if the people who are called to lead it have not been renewed themselves? Therefore, renewal for the church cannot just begin in the pew—it must begin in the pulpit and hopefully spread to the pew!

> As evidenced by the attendance of people from many different denominations and numerous independent churches at the meeting, immediately following the April 9 service, the religious segment of the city was indeed stirred. As corroborated by multiple testimonies after the meetings of April 9th, the meetings at the Bonnie house did indeed run twenty-four hours a day for at least three days. People reported falling under the power of God and receiving the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues while listening to Seymour preach from across the street. The crowds grew so large it became impossible to get close to the house, and the press of the people who tried to get into the house became so great

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[2] Vinson Synan, *The Century of The Holy Spirit: 100 Years of Pentecostal and Charismatic Renewal, 1901-2001* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 39.

> that the foundation collapsed sending the porch crashing into the steep front yard. Within one week it became necessary to find a larger location for the almost continuous prayer, praise, and worship service that had erupted on April 9, 1906.[3]

Revival had begun. This small revival that started simply as a small prayer group would grow to reverberate throughout the country and bring about renewal in the hearts of many that were hungry for change. This expected change is also for today's churches that are desiring spiritual renewal. Churches today must not only have a desire for spiritual renewal, but true revival must begin by first acknowledging that they are spiritually stagnant, spiritually dead, and in need of revitalization, a coming alive again!

I believe that the historical study of the era of the Azusa Street Revival and the person of William J. Seymour and other leaders of the Pentecostal Movement give my project on revitalization an underpinning and foundation. Just as the Azusa Street Revival sparked a sense of renewal that impacted and revitalized preachers, church leaders, missionaries, and the church, this same outpouring of God's presence (the Holy Spirit) is relevant and available for today's church. The church today, just like the church of Azusa, can and must experience a revival and movement of the Holy Spirit that will bring about the renewal and revitalization that dying, declining, and stagnant churches need. I will attempt to show the significance of the Azusa Street Revival and aspects of Seymour's life, ministry, and journey that were critical to the revival's impact. I will also attempt to identify and highlight areas of the revival that are the foundation and first step to experiencing revitalization today.

In this historical chapter, we will examine William Seymour and the Azuza Street Revival. We will discuss the following topics:

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[3] Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 49-50.

1. The man/the messenger (William Seymour)
2. The ministry (his ministry journey)
3. The movement (the effects of the Azusa Street Mission)

I hope to show how elements of the revival's impact relate to revitalization. When I speak of revival, renewal, and revitalization I am speaking of making something come alive again!

Davis defines the word revitalize as "to make alive again" and states that revitalization happens when God repairs a once-healthy church by changing its course, saving it from disease and death. In Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven, God commands Ezekiel to speak God's words to dry bones and command them to live. In other words, he was telling Ezekiel to speak God's words to the bones of people that were once alive but now are dead so that they would live again. Davis makes the point that God commands that the church acts in the Holy Spirit's power, bringing about a fantastic opportunity to bring revitalization. He notes that in the evangelical church's history when leaders defined revival, it had to do with massive evangelical fruit. He argues that revival and revitalization are words for the same thing.[4]

[4] William Marshall, *Church Revitalization Resources and Connections for the Northside of Indianapolis* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2021), 16-17.

Main Body

The Man, The Messenger/ William J. Seymour: -The Catalyst of Pentecost

It is said that "everything rises and falls on leadership." While this may be a cliché, we cannot help but point out that cliches often reflect reality. Leaders matter for church revitalization. "Leadership Journal" studied 761 respondents from thirty-one churches to analyze the factors leading to church revitalization. They found that:

> Five key factors, the first of which was helping the church get honest about its condition. They said that Turnaround leaders distinguish between obvious symptoms and underlying problems. The first step is helping the congregation admit there is a problem and find the underlying (foundational) causes. It took leadership to help these churches see the real issues involved. Leadership and vision are major keys to any type of turnaround (revitalization) in churches. Leaders help churches see that their real problems are spiritual.[5]

It is the responsibility of church leadership, especially the pastor, to ensure that their church experiences revitalization and is in constant health. The leadership and the pastor of a church do not shoulder this responsibility alone but are responsible for the church's health. God always requires leadership to act powerfully by the Holy Spirit's leading to bring revitalization to a church.

> From the beginning, William Joseph Seymour was the acknowledged leader of the Azusa Street congregation. He had brought the Apostolic Faith message to Los Angles when he arrived in February 1906. He had proclaimed it to the members of the Ninth and Santa Fe congregation. He had shared it with Edward and Mattie Lee and with those who met for prayer at the Asberry home. He had prayed with them until they had been baptized in the Holy Spirit. And when they received that baptism, he became their pastor by acclamation. While several people have written about Pastor Seymour, they have not said much about Seymour as a leader. Further study of many sources surrounding the mission and

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[5] Mike Dodson and Ed Stetzer, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing, 2022), 34-35.

> its activities, however, has made it possible to present a more complete picture of Seymour as a leader.[6]

> The Protestant Reformation began with Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Germany, in a broken-down building amid the public square-a humble beginning for a revival that would shake the world. D'Aubigne described that place: In the middle of the square at Wittenberg stood an ancient wooden chapel, thirty feet and twenty feet wide, whose walls, propped up on all sides, were falling into ruin. An old pulpit made of planks, and three feet high, received the preacher. It was in this wretched place that the preaching of the Reformation began. It was God's will that that which was to restore his glory should have the humblest surroundings. Similarly, a few hundred years later a dead-end street in the middle of the industrial section of Los Angeles, California, the beginning of the Pentecostal movement would begin in a humble, former Methodist church building at 312 Azusa Street. In the modest building, an unassuming group of racially mixed folk who were hungry for the presence of God would experience the Pentecostal fire falling upon them. The leader was not a theologian with a compelling presence or a commanding speech. He was a humble, one-eyed Black man with a light beard and face scarred by smallpox who came from Houston, Texas with the Pentecostal message burning in his heart.[7]

This was William J. Seymour, the catalyst of Pentecost and the Azuza Street Revival. Amazingly, both transformative movements (The Reformation and the Azusa Street Revival) began with willing servant leaders. They began with a messenger, a preacher, who was open and hungry to experience revival! Revitalization begins with a servant leader that is willing to be used as a vessel of God's transformative power to a people in need of revitalization/revival.

> William J. Seymour was born on May 2, 1870, in Centerville, Louisiana. His parents, Simon, and Phyllis were freed from slavery only a few years earlier. Seymour was born at a time when racial prejudice was rampant. The Ku Klux Klan was visible in almost every community in the South, and the Jim Crow Law was in full force preventing the mixing of the races. Jim Crow was the name of the racial caste system that operated primarily, but not exclusively in Southern and border states between 1877 and the mid-1960s. Jim Crow was more than a

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[6] Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 90.

[7] Roberts Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival When the Fire Fell* (Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, 2006), 87-88.

> series of rigid anti-Black laws; it was a way of life. Under Jim Crow, African Americans were relegated to the status of second-class citizens. These heinous laws enforced separate use of water fountains, public bathhouses, and separate seating sections on public transport. The Jim Crow laws represented the legitimization of anti-Black racism. Sadly, discrimination and segregation were also prevalent in churches, and many Christian ministers and theologians taught that whites were the 'chosen people,' Black people were cursed to be servants, and God supported racial segregation. Many in those days did not believe that Black people even had a soul. The coming Pentecostal revival would eventually help to drive a stake into the heart of these detestable laws and beliefs.[8]

Despite the horrible, racist conditions that Seymour was born into, God in His providence raised up this young Black preacher born to former slaves to be the catalyst for a revival, a spiritual movement that transformed their lives and brought together people of all types. In the years to come the Azusa Street Revival, despite being criticized, had some influence on the racial divide and helped bring people of different races together.

> In spite of this criticism, people of all types-educated, uneducated, rich, poor, African Americans, Asians, Hispanics, whites, men, women, native-born, recent immigrants, and foreign visitors-prayed, sang, and came to the altar together. In the words of Frank Bartleman, 'The color line was washed away in the blood. Early photographs clearly show African Americans, whites, men, and women, all in leadership roles. The relaxation of then-current racial and sexual barriers represented a threat to many who were wedded to the prevailing status quo.' This feature of the Azusa Street revival also helped to bring about the persecution of early Pentecostals as well as the widespread denial of the revival's validity.[9] Young Seymour found his identity in Jesus Christ, believing that the Lord was the only liberator of mankind. He was a sensitive, high-spirited youth, and hungry for the truth of God's Word. It is said he experienced divine visions, and that early in life he began to look for the return of Jesus Christ. With no formal education, like many others in those times, he taught himself to read by constantly reading the Bible. In 1895 Seymour moved to Cincinnati, Ohio where he continued to work as a waiter. While there he came into contact with holiness teachings through Martin Wells Knapps's God's Revivalist movement and Daniel S. Warner's

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[8] Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival*, 89.

[9] Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit*, 54.

> Church of God Reformation movement, otherwise known as the Evening Light Saints. These teachings deeply impressed the young Seymour.[10]

Throughout this project, we have mentioned how important the word of God and the teaching of God's word is to our personal as well as the church's revitalization. "Church revitalization cannot be bought from a Christian bookstore. God's word must be unleashed, not only weekly from the pulpit but also throughout every ministry and moment of church life. God's Word alone has the power to save souls and bring them to Christlike maturity."[11]

Seymour was a man of God that believed in the importance and authority of the word of God. Seymour also believed in the importance of training and apprenticeship. In his early years, he would often be found sitting at the feet of Pentecostal leaders who taught and instructed him in the word of God. This hunger for spiritual growth and a deeper understanding of the scriptures was pivotal to his future ministry. It was while he was with this group that he received his call to the ministry, a call he wrestled with. In the midst of the struggle, he contracted smallpox, which was usually fatal at that time. He survived three weeks of horrible suffering and was left with blindness in his left eye and severe facial scarring. After his recovery, he immediately submitted to the call of God and was licensed and ordained as a minister by Evening Light Saints. Soon, he began traveling as an itinerant preacher.[12]

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[10] Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival,* 90.

[11] Andrew Davis, *Revitalize: Biblical Keys to Helping Your Church Come Alive Again* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2017), 23.

[12] Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival*, 90.

The Ministry / The Azusa Street Mission

The beginning of the Pentecost Azusa Street outpouring started in a cottage prayer meeting at 214 North Bonnie Brae Street. We cannot talk about the impact of the Azusa Street Revival outpouring without talking about the importance of prayer! Prayer was an intricate part of Seymour's ministry and a large part of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street. "Many evangelists had been stirring the hungry hearts in Southern California for several years, and there was already evidence of a spiritual stirring before Seymour arrived. Many groups were engaged in intense prayer, door-to-door witnessing, and waiting for the coming revival that they longed to see."[13]

> Seymour would soon begin organizing prayer meetings in the homes of Black friends for those who were hungry to hear the message. Eventually, Mr. and Mrs. Asberry invited him to stay in their home on North Bonnie Brae Street. Seymour accepted and they started holding meetings in their home in February 1906. Seymour made a strong pitch to the group to invite Lucy Farrow to come join the group. Consequently, money was collected to bring Miss Farrow, and when she arrived, Seymour called for ten days of prayer and fasting. During that time, Edward Lee, a janitor employed at the First National Bank, asked Seymour to come pray for him because of his ailing health. Seymour arrived, anointed him with oil, and he was healed. Then Lee asked him to pray for the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Even though Seymour had not personally received the experience, he prayed for Lee, and Lee immediately began speaking in tongues. They could not wait to get to the meeting that night.[14]

What we see happening to these early believers is Acts 1:4-5, where they were gathered on one accord in one place and prayed. The result was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They were renewed by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and prayer was the start of that renewal! Just as prayer was critical to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which was crucial to the Azusa movement. This same intensity of prayer is needed in today's

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[13] Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival*, 94.

[14] Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival,* 95-96.

church to experience revival. For pastors and leaders who really are desperate for revitalization, they must begin where these Pentecostal leaders began, on their knees in prayer! The church must be convinced and committed to the fact that prayer still works! It is and has been the starting point of every great spiritual move of God!

> There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer. So, in the matter of revitalization, when God is determining to renew a church from a cold, backslidden, unbelieving state, He first prepares them for it through prayer, causing them to forsake their sinful self-sufficiency and worldliness and to seek his face with great fervor. In some ways, we could argue that churches do not merely pray for revival but that prayer itself is revival. We must saturate the church in prayer. Prayer is essential to the revitalization of a dying and stagnant church. Through prayer, we fully rely on God and acknowledge our powerlessness to affect the many changes that will need to be made to experience revitalization. Prayer changes us and mysteriously changes things by the sovereign power of God.[15]

God ordains church revitalization through spiritual-led, scripture-based, passionate prayer by the pastor, church leaders, and members. In church revitalization, just as we see with the leaders of the Azusa Street Revival, the senior pastor and ministry leaders are an example to the church concerning the priority of prayer for revitalization. A congregation needs to see prayer modeled by the leaders to capture a desire and heart to pray for God to turn their church around. Unless pastors and church leadership become men and women of prayer and challenge the church to faithful heartfelt prayer, the church will not experience revival and revitalization.

> When Seymour and the members arrived at the Asberry Home on Bonnie Street, every room was packed with people. Many were already praying. Seymour took charge of the meeting, leading the group in songs, testimonies, and more prayer. Then, he began to tell the story of Mr. Lee's healing and his infilling of the Holy Spirit. As soon as Seymour finished, Lee raised his hands and began to speak in tongues. The entire group dropped to their knees as they worshipped God and cried out for the baptism. Then, six or seven people lifted their voices and began

[15] Davis, *Revitalize,* 23, 94-97.

> to speak in another tongue. Jenny Evans Moore, who would later marry Seymour, fell to her knees from the piano bench as one of the first to speak in tongues.[16]

The church of today needs to fall on its knees again just as the leaders of the Azusa Street Pentecostal movement in the early church did. The intentionality of the church unified in prayer for one purpose, a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit is a must for churches that desire spiritual renewal.

The act of falling on their knees was a sign of their brokenness, humility, and hunger for the baptism of the Holy Spirit with all its transforming power! They were in search of revival, renewal, and change! The church today has spent its time focused primarily on the blessings of God, while I believe God desires for us to focus on a broken and contrite heart. A heart that wants more of God's heart, than God's hand (blessings).

> For three days they celebrated 'early Pentecost restored.' The news spread quickly, bringing crowds that would fill the Asberry's house and the yard surrounding their home. It is said that the Asberry's front porch became the pulpit, and the street the pews, as Seymour would address the people from the home. It was on the third night that Seymour would finally experience his own encounter with the Holy Spirit. Late on the evening of April 12, 1906, after many had already left the meeting, the long-awaited gift finally came to the man who had been preaching of this gift for so many others.[17]

> The church of Jesus Christ was birthed as a world-changing force at a prayer meeting. In that upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, as the small group of disciples was gathered to pray continually and wait on God to send the gift of the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5, 14), suddenly there came the sound of a rushing wind and the appearance of tongues of fire. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in tongues as the Spirit enabled them (Acts 2:1-4). There was a great ingathering of souls that day by the power of sovereign grace: three thousand were added to their number. It is no accident that humble, united prevailing patient prayer preceded the outpouring of the Spirit and harvest of souls into the church. When the church forsakes this kind of prayer, it takes a vigorous step toward its own extinction.[18]

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[16] Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival,* 96.

[17] Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival*, 97.

[18] Davis, *Revitalize,* 94-95.

This statement provides us with a reminder and warning concerning the power of prayer. The reminder is that prayer works. Seymour and these other believers took the word of God literally and gathered to pray because they believed that through prayer, they, like the believers in (Acts 1:4-5; and 2:1-4), would experience the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as Jesus promised them. Their obedience to the scriptures and the practice of prayer would be the keys to opening the floodgates of heaven.

The caution would be that when we cease to prioritize the spiritual practice of prayer, we close the door that leads to that power, which is in the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It is not the presence and power of God that is not available to us. However, in the same way, a knotted or kinked water hose restricts and obstructs the water from freely flowing. Likewise, does the absence of prioritized prayer hinder the outpouring of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit needed for renewal.

> There was no keeping the crowds away, and because of the loud prayers that disturbed the neighbors and the increasing number of people cramped into small quarters, there became an urgent need to find a larger building at a different location. Seymour's friends quickly located a vacant, two-story, whitewashed, wooden frame building at 312 Azusa Street. It was an old, discarded building on Azusa Street that had been used for a Methodist church but had been vacant for years. It seemed to have been waiting for the Lord and there began that great worldwide revival, where the people came from all over the world by the hundreds and thousands. The meeting lasted for three years, day and night, without a break.[19]

A key aspect of what was happening at Azusa after they received the baptism of the Holy Spirit is what I believe is needed to experience spiritual renewal leading to revitalization in the church today. There must be an intentional focus on the spiritual before the natural or practical. This is a priority on the spiritual growth of individuals,

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[19] Liardon, *The Azusa Street Revival*, 98.

which in turn opens the opportunity to experience numerical growth in our congregations. When leading congregations in renewal, there is the potential to only focus on numerical growth. We give more of our time to the methods and strategies, and not enough time to the spiritual practices. Both are needed, but one should take precedence, and that is our spiritual growth.

When we focus on spiritual growth, eventually numerical growth will come. I like to call it the inside-out principle. Focus on the inner spiritual man first, then focus on the outer or natural man. Belief begets behavior, so focus on the person's belief system (their faith) first, and it will influence their behavior (lifestyle). In basketball, they may call it inside out. You start your offense from the inside by throwing the ball into the interior of your offense, and as the defense collapses you then throw it (kick it) back outside to hopefully get a better, clearly open shot at the basket. The key is getting to the goal and making the basket. The process to the goal is working the inside out. Spiritual Renewal that leads to church revitalization warrants the same concept, inside out!

In Acts 1:1-8, the disciples are encouraged to go into the upper room to pray (a spiritual practice), and after praying they will experience the infilling, outpouring of the Holy Spirit. After this infilling of the Holy Spirit, they are to now focus outwardly on the natural man and be an outward witness of what Christ has done for them on the inside. Seymour and those in the Azusa Street Revival began with an inward spiritual focus on prayer that produced a revival leading to numerical growth. These Azusa Street believers worked from the inside out. This leads me to believe that spiritual renewal that produces revitalization starts as an “inside job” that ultimately leads to an outward transformation.

The Movement / The Mission / The Effects of Revival/Revitalization.

> A few months after the revival had opened, hundreds were pouring into the building on Azusa Street. Osterberg reported that as many as 21,300 attended the services and up to 800 crowded into the building at a time, every inch big enough for a chair was jammed full. The Los Angeles Daily Times reported the room was crowded almost to suffocation. Many were seated in the windows and scores who could not enter crowded around the lobby and struggled to view. Many of the newly baptized in the Holy Spirit would feel a call to the mission field. Consequently, men and women were departing for Scandinavia, China, India, Egypt, Ireland, and various other nations. Even sister Julia Hutchin, who initially locked Seymour out of her mission, came to Azusa, received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and left for Africa.[20]

The effects of the outpouring at the Azusa Street Revival spread far beyond the walls of the Azusa Street mission! Its impact revitalized the lives of people and leaders who in turn were used by God to bring about revitalization in their communities, churches, and ministries. Just as in Acts 1:8 ("But you shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you and you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth"), after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, they were to go and be witnesses. The same occurred with those who experienced the Azusa Street Revival, they were renewed and revitalized by the power of the Holy Spirit and in turn, empowered others.

"In the Los Angeles area by 1912, while the Azusa Street Mission was still in operation, the number of churches and missions that directly traced their beginning to the Azusa Street revival was impressive. Each of the following Pentecostal churches was founded and led by people who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the Azusa

[20] Lairdon, *The Azusa Street Revival*, 104-105.

Street Mission and then moved on to work in other arms of the city."[21] This is revitalization at work!

> One of Elder Seymour's original board members, James Alexander, founded two Apostolic Faith Missions, one at Seventh and Setous, the other on Fifty-first Street. Another Pentecostal Assembly in Los Angeles was founded by W. F. Manley. A Spanish Apostolic Faith was soon flourishing under the guidance of G. Valenzuella. Two other places of worship were founded and directed by William Saxby, the Apostolic Faith Rescue Mission on First Street and the Carr Street Pentecostal Mission. The Upper Room Mission was established by Elmer Fisher. Two men, Frank Bartleman and John Pendleton, were founding pastors of the Eighth and Maple Mission. The Florence Avenue Pentecostal Mission was led by W. L. Sargent. A.G. Osterberg was in charge at the Full Gospel Assembly, and William Durham from Chicago had founded and was preaching at the Seventh Street Mission. These were all people and leaders who had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit at the Azusa Street Mission and who began ministries that would revitalize their churches and their communities.[22]

> Several leaders of previously existing denominations also came to the Azusa Street Mission, received the baptism with the Holy Spirit, and then returned to lead their denominations, either partially or wholly, into the Pentecostal ranks. The first of these, Charles H. Mason, founder of the Church of God in Christ, came to Azusa Street for an extended visit in 1907. Upon returning to his headquarters in Memphis, he and the message of Pentecost were rejected by the majority of the church. This led to a split in the church in 1907 when Mason and those who agreed with him reorganized the Church of God in Christ as a Pentecostal denomination. As the only early convert to Pentecostalism who came from a legally incorporated church, Bishop Mason played a vital part in the spread of the movement and its message. Through his practice of ordaining ministers of all races, he acted as a conduit for the Azusa Street revival to reach all parts of the United States.[23]

> Acts 1:8 is explicit in saying that the Holy Spirit gives Christians the power to witness for Christ. The pastor of a dying church or a church that needs revitalization needs to model being guided by the Holy Spirit in his witness for Jesus. DeVries claims reliance on the Holy Spirit is the framework of the Spirit's normal means for church renewal. He encourages that capable church revitalization leaders should seek consistently to operate grounded on this principle. Sanders points out that there is a great need for the Holy Spirit's

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[21] Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit,* 65.

[22] Synan, *The Century of The Holy Spirit,* 65.

[23] Synan, *The Century of the Holy Spirit,* 65-66.

> anointing as seen in Isaiah 42:1, and that the leadership qualities of approval, dependence, empathy, modesty, or optimism are not sufficient for the task without this anointing (God's presence).[24]
>
> Church members, especially in a revitalization, need to be rubbing shoulders with the lost in their community, being an active and engaging part of their society. Rainer notes that dying churches do not realize that the Great Commission's clear command should be the 'vision centerpiece' of a thriving church. Henard relates that a church will lose its vision if it has a misunderstanding of the Great Commission.[25]

Conclusion

At the foundation of the Azusa Street Revival was the power of the Holy Spirit which bought about revival, renewal, and revitalization.

> What is the relationship between revitalization and revival? Many evangelical churches talk about revival a great deal. They pray for it, yearn for it, and preach so that it will come about. And ever since the day of Pentecost, the church has sought an outpouring of the Holy Spirit resulting in greater holiness and evangelist power. Charles Spurgeon explains we could not speak of the re-vival of a thing which never lived before. The term 'revival' can only be applied to a living soul, or to that which once lived. To be revived is a blessing which can only be enjoyed by those who have some degree of life. Those who have no spiritual life are not, and cannot be, in the strictest sense of the term, the subjects of a revival. Many blessings may come to the unconverted in consequence of a revival among Christians, but the revival itself has to do only with those who already possess spiritual life. There must be vitality to some degree before there can be a quickening of vitality, or, in other words, a revival. A true revival is to be looked for in the church of God. So, in the end, one could argue that revival and revitalization are really words for the same thing. Perhaps the only difference might be the spiritual heights to which the revitalized church soars in fervor and in evangelistic fruit. But that is a matter of degree, not of essential nature.[26]

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[24] William Marshal, *Church Revitalization: Resources and Connections for the Northside of Indianapolis* (Lynchburg, VA: Liberty University, 2021), 35.

[25] Marshal, *Church Revitalization*, 36.

[26] Davis, *Revitalize,* 32-33.

Just as Seymour sought God and did the things that opened the door for an outpouring of God's Spirit, we must also be willing to make the same sacrifices and seek God if we are to also experience revitalization in the church. My study has focused on William Seymour and The Azusa Street Revival. Specifically, we have examined The Man (Seymour), The Ministry, and The Movement (Azusa's effects). The experiences of the Azusa Street Revival and the outpouring of God's Spirit bringing about revival and revitalization have been a critical testament and historical witness to my work and research of church revitalization. The significance of choosing William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival as my historical figure has given me the inspiration and critical insights to help me develop a foundation for my project.

> Church Revitalization Must Be a Work of God's Spirit. If God desires for the church to be revitalized, He certainly can provide the power for that result to materialize. Thus, if we desire for that work to remain, it must be a movement of God. God uses people and structures. He affirms programs and mission statements. I do not believe that God is anti-methodology, yet all those things are irrelevant if God's Spirit does not move. In fact, many of the obstacles that a pastor faces in revitalization are overcome simply through the power of the Holy Spirit. It is amazing what happens when people, including pastors, get right with God.[27]

It can be difficult for leaders who have been so used to always leading to be open to being led themselves. There is an intentionality for leaders that comes with having to sit in silence with the distractions so that we can hear the still small voice of the Holy Spirit directing and leading us. Renewal leaders must be disciplined enough to curb the urge to do and just be with God and the Holy Spirit. If we find ourselves missing precious opportunities to just "be" with God and listen for the Holy Spirit's direction, we will also

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[27] Bill Henard, *Can These Bones Live? A Practical Guide to Church Revitalization* (Athens, GA: ReClaimed Church Publishing, 2021), 23.

find that the ministry road of leading others to revitalization becomes much harder and the load much heavier than it should.

> In Spite of any revitalization project or method that you might follow, without the Holy Spirit, our efforts are frustrating and will be fruitless. It is extremely important to understand how God uses means to bring about His program. We recognize the absolute Sovereignty of our Savior Jesus (Philippians 2:5-11). Skeptics may try to cast doubt, but in my opinion, no questions exist as to His rule and reign. In His Sovereignty, though, God has chosen to use people, programs, and methods to carry out His work. Our conclusion must be out of those facts that Jesus is not bound to produce results just because we implement the right method or follow the right program. Remember this truth: church revitalization occurs because of the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, not just because of our efforts.[28]

For the church to be revived, it will require a mighty move of God's Spirit, just as the Spirit was poured out on so many at Azusa Street. Following a specific methodology or program does not guarantee success. The leader may fervently desire for the church to revitalize and grow, but genuine church growth demands more than personal passion; it requires the Spirit of God. Church revitalization begins with laying the foundation of God's Word through preaching and prayer, followed by a move of God's Spirit! Just as Seymour and others prayed for a move of God and experienced renewal, we too can pray for an outpouring of God's Spirit and witness revitalization.

[28] Henard, *Can These Bones Live?*, 28.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8). The theological theme that best supports and informs my project on revitalization is the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's role in revitalization. My thesis for this chapter as it relates to my project on revitalization is the role that the Holy Spirit plays as a primary and major agent of revitalization. The more I research this area of revitalization, I discover that it is closely aligned with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a primary agent of church revitalization, and church leaders should cooperate with the Holy Spirit as the Spirit works for revitalization. Therefore, it is the Holy Spirit that empowers church leaders to be used to revive, renew, and revitalize a church.

As Devries explains:

> The Holy Spirit is the divine agent who produces church revitalization. He normally uses us as secondary human agents to communicate the Word of Christ through various modes of ministry. As we confess our dependence on the Holy Spirit and as we are faithful in ministry, he may sovereignly choose to work repentance and revitalization in the church. Thus, we are called to be co-workers of the Holy Spirit, as he is busy working for revitalization individually in believers and collectively and communally in the whole church.[1]

[1] Brian A. DeVries, *Divine Empowerment: The Holy Spirit and Church Revitalization* (Grand Rapids, MI: Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary, 2015), 2.

Church revitalization must be a work of God's Spirit. If God wants the church to be revitalized, God certainly can and will provide the power for that result to materialize. God is not anti-methodology, yet all those methods are irrelevant if God's Spirit does not move. Many of the challenges and obstacles a pastor or leader faces in revitalization can be overcome with planning and the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's work does not exempt the leader from their work and role in the process of revitalization.

DeVries writes:

> As with many methodologies for church renewal, there is often in practice an apparent tension between divine sovereignty and human strategies for success. There has at times been a tendency in both church and mission to overlook the role of the Holy Spirit by emphasizing human methods and strategy. The cardinal error of revitalization is committed by replacing the divine work of the Spirit with human means. More recently, church growth principles of strategies and techniques have replaced a humble dependence on God's sovereignty, often causing the Holy Spirit to become the forgotten factor in various pragmatic calculations.[2]

Statement of Problem and Hypothesis

> According to Leadership Journal, 340,000 churches are in need of church revitalization. Many of us know the statistics, but few of us care enough to engage these churches. Churches need to change in order to reach their communities and denominations need to help them. Not every church needs radical transformation, but most need a transformation. The natural question is, who wants a stagnant church? And the obvious answer is "Nobody"! Yet, the real truth is that most churches will not make the adjustments and changes necessary to move from stagnation and decline to revitalization and growth. Doing the same things, the same way will not revitalize them.[3]

My context is Christ Family Church located in Cary, North Carolina. Christ family church has been in existence for twenty-four years and has had some level of

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[2] DeVries, *Divine Empowerment*, 2.

[3] Ed Stetzer, *Comeback Churches* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing Group, 2007), 18.

health and success. Over the last few years, however, the church has become stagnated, plateaued, and needs revitalization. We have particularly seen a decline in Wednesday night prayer, Bible study, and service (evangelism) participation. This lack of participation affects the spiritual health and growth of members, which in turn affects the health and growth of the church and its ministry. The church currently has two hundred members on its role. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, 125-155 parishioners on average attended regularly. After COVID-19, we have seen on average from 100-125 parishioners attend regularly. The church's membership is predominantly African American and is led by me, a full-time pastor, and my wife, the full-time church administrator, choir, and music director. There is an Elders' board and deacon ministry that assists with the care of the membership. Our ministry servant team of volunteers serves the Sunday-to-Sunday ministries. The church provides ministry to all ages and stages, from nursery to senior ministry.

Hypothesis

It is apparent that churches desiring revitalization need to make changes to experience revitalization and come alive again. Whether those changes occur through rekindling Jesus's mission for the church, mobilizing the laity, focusing on leadership development, engaging in more strategic prayer efforts, increasing evangelistic emphasis, or making other needed changes, business as usual will continue to produce the same slow growth or stagnant environment that plagues many churches.

A new disciple model using prayer, preaching/teaching, and service (evangelism) can position the people to experience revitalization, which in turn leads to the church

experiencing revitalization. This revitalization will be embodied by the members actively engaging in prayer, preaching/teaching (bible study/Sunday worship), and service (evangelism) efforts.

Organization/Overview

My approach to my theological foundations chapter on the Holy Spirit and the Spirit's role in church revitalization will begin with an examination of the Holy Spirit. We will then discuss the importance of the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit in prayer, and the Holy Spirit in preaching, as they relate to their importance to revitalization.

The Holy Spirit

"And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). Achtemeier defines "the Holy Spirit, as the mysterious power or presence of God in nature or with individuals and communities, inspiring or empowering them with qualities they would not otherwise possess. The term "spirit" translates Hebrew (rauch) and Greek (pneuma) words denoting "wind," "breath," and by extension, a life-giving element. With the adjective "holy" the reference is to the divine spirit, i.e., the Spirit of God."[4]

Achtemeier continues:

> "In the Old Testament, three major emphases may be identified, the first of which is the Holy Spirit as an agent in creation. This is an almost impersonal representation of the Spirit by which the awesome power of God is depicted (eg.,

[4] Paul J. Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1985), 401.

> Gen. 1:2; Ps. 33:6; Ezek. 37:1-10). The second emphasis is the Holy Spirit as a source of inspiration and power. In these instances (particularly evident in the stories of the judges, kings, and prophets), the Holy Spirit becomes a vehicle of God's revelation and activity. The third emphasis is the Holy Spirit as God's presence in the covenantal community. To some degree connected with eschatological hope and expectations of the sanctification of Israel, this aspect is significant, if less frequently found, understanding of the Holy Spirit (see esp. Ezek. 11:14-2; 36:22-32).[5]
>
> In the New Testament, a more diverse range of meanings for this term is to be seen. Although the earlier usage continues (it is the Spirit of God that endows Jesus with power as the Messiah [Matt. 3:13-17; Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21-22; Matt. 12:28; Luke 4:16-21) and that empowers the church for its mission [Acts 2]). The Holy Spirit comes to represent both the presence and activity of God and the continuing presence of Jesus Christ in the church. While not uniquely Johannine, this idea comes to fullest expression in John 14, where the Holy Spirit is described as a "Counselor" (Paraclete) who represents both divine presence and guidance for the disciples.[6]

For a church that seeks spiritual renewal, the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit are essential. Without the Holy Spirit's presence, true transformation or change cannot occur, which is the foundation for revitalization. It is the Holy Spirit who convicts us while also guiding us in the paths of righteousness (right living). How often have we nearly slipped into sin, but the Holy Spirit's presence in our lives provides a way of escape?

It was this divine presence of the Holy Spirit that guided and led Mary and Joseph as they escaped death at the hands of an envious, hateful king named Herod! This same divine presence of the Holy Spirit guided Peter, directed by an angel, out of a prison cell before his execution and continues to lead Peter to a home where believers were found praying for him.

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[5] Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary*, 401.

[6] Achtemeier, *Harper's Bible Dictionary,* 401.

Achetemeier would say the presence of the Holy Spirit is our "Counselor," leading and guiding the life of the believer to a life of renewal. It is safe to conclude that there can be no renewal in the church without the divine presence of the Holy Spirit actively guiding and leading the Christian and the church.

In Acts, there is a close connection among four elements: the proclamation of the gospel, baptism, the laying on of hands, and the reception of the Holy Spirit. In both Acts and Paul's Letters, reception of the Holy Spirit brings the "gifts" needed for Christian ministry (as well as the gift of ecstatic speech) and extends the presence and power of Christ to each new generation of Christians.

Starkey writes:

> John Wesley uses the term "inspiration" for the general ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life. He speaks of this inspiration as the inward assistance of the Holy Ghost which helps our infirmities, enlightens our understanding, rectifies our will, comforts, purifies, and sanctifies us. Such an inbreathing of the Holy Spirit is an absolute necessity for the Christian life without exception. Wesley uses the term "inspire" in its root sense; the Holy Spirit breathes his own presence into our souls." He prefers the term "inspiration" because it is more scriptural. It is used by the Church of England, and is most apt. He sees that "breathing bears a near relation to spirit and he describes the Christian life as a continual I-Thou, spiritual respiration. This "inspiration" Wesley affirms as "the main doctrine of the Methodists.[7]

Peter, like Wesley experiences this inspiration, this inward assistance that comes from the Holy Spirit. This same inspiration stirs him to boldly preach (Acts 2:14) to all those who witnessed the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. This is the disciple Peter who denies Jesus on several occasions (Lk. 22:60). Something is different about Peter after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit, he

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[7] Lycurgus M. Starkey, *The Work of The Holy Spirit A Study in Wesleyan Theology* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1962), 17.

receives what Wesley calls inspiration, an in-breathing, inward assistance, that gives him the courage to stand and not run! Peter now, because of the Holy Spirit, defends the faith, instead of denying the faith. I contend that this inspiration, "the inspiration of the Holy Spirit" is also needed to create within the Christian the spiritual renewal needed to experience revitalization in the church.

Greshem states:

> According to Charles Finney, "to be filled with the Spirit is to experience the Spirit as an abiding, indwelling presence who imparts peace within one's soul, victory in one's life, and wisdom and power in securing the conversion of sinners. The Spirit-filled Christian knows the Spirit, especially as the "Spirit of prayer" and his influence in his prayers. Thus, Christians are to pray for the Holy Spirit and persevere in prayer until they receive. Finney stated that the Christian needs the Spirit for two reasons: first for personal sanctification, and second, for becoming useful in doing God's work in the world. The Spirit isn't given merely to make the Christian happy, though he does impart great peace and joy. A Christian should pray for the Spirit that they may be more useful and glorify God more, not that he himself be more happy.[8]

I find joy and happiness in being a Christian. The Holy Spirit empowers us to live as Christian witnesses to the world. Without the presence of the Holy Spirit, we lack the power needed to experience true spiritual renewal, which is vital to the church's witness! Therefore, there must be a hunger and intentional desire to pray, as they prayed in the upper room (Acts 1:13-14) until something happened. The church today must pray until we also experience that rushing mighty wind (Acts 2:2), with the Holy Spirit filling, refreshing, and renewing our souls.

The hymnist has penned in the Hymn "Blessed Quietness." Joys are flowing like a river since the comforter has come; He abides with us forever and makes the trusting

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[8] John L. Gresham, Jr., *Charles G. Finney's Doctrine of the Baptism of The Holy Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 15.

heart his home. I believe that Wesley would say that his trusting heart in Jesus Christ has made a home for the indwelling of the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit can only fill the heart that has trusted in Jesus. Christians will only experience the transformative power of the Holy Spirit when they first trust in and make Jesus the Lord of their lives.

Presence and Power of the Holy Spirit

Starkey states that:

> John Wesley's doctrinal concern with the work of the Holy Spirit grew out of his own Christian experience and that of his fellow converts. Prepared by all the inadequacy of his past experience, at Aldersgate Wesly allowed the Holy Spirit to transform him. Now the form and structure of his faith had life and power. His convictions were sharpened and strengthened with might in the inner man-all of which would be so necessary in the tumultuous and hazardous days to come. Wesley's own life experience convinced him that nominal Christianity is futile without a personal Pentecost, the indwelling and abiding of the Holy Spirit. This conviction was confirmed by the Evangelical Revival that transformed eighteenth-century England and by the Great Awakening in the American colonies, which made an indelible impression upon the religious landscape of the new world.[9]

Church revitalization always begins as the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. This fact should come as no surprise to those who confess that the Holy Spirit is sovereign. The sovereignty of the Holy Spirit, in both personal conversation and church renewal, has been confessed by Christians since the early days of the church. According to DeVries:

> The history of the Early Church gives clear evidence in several biblical passages of the Spirit's sovereign power in the church. Perhaps the clearest passage is Acts 1:6-11, which gives an account of Jesus' parting instructions to the leaders of the New Testament Church. Parallel to the Great Commission passages, Jesus here instructs these church leaders to wait for the divine empowerment for the task of witnessing of Christ. Acts 1:8 is essential to this passage and the whole book: 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of

[9] Starkey, *The Work of The Holy Spirit*, 15-16.

> the earth.' Thus, when the Holy Spirit would come, then they will receive power to be witnesses of Christ.[10]

Jesus's parting instructions were not new for these church leaders. He had already given similar instructions. Earlier, Jesus commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father (Acts 1:4). Shortly after his resurrection, Jesus said, "You are my witnesses of these things. And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high" (Lk. 24:48-49). These commandments of waiting for the power on high and being filled with the Holy Spirit to become witnesses of the things of Christ were not strange to the disciples. The Holy Spirit as promised, was poured out into the church at Pentecost and continues to fill believers for the gospel ministry.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit in a leader's life is essential for qualifying and empowering them to facilitate the revitalization process in both their life and church. It is the Holy Spirit that sparks the desire and longing for change. Without it, leaders and believers seeking renewal are left to their own strengths, which often fall Short. I believe this is why Jesus instructs his disciples to go to Jerusalem and be endowed with power from on high, the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:49). Jesus understood that he would soon be gone, and the disciples would need the divine presence and power of the Holy Spirit to live and follow God's plan.

Without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, all ministry is to no avail. Therefore, the New Testament calls us to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-26), to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18), and to be co-workers with the Spirit (2 Cor. 6:1). Therefore, attempting revitalization without the Holy Spirit's go against the parting instructions of

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[10] Devries, *Divine Empowerment*, 2.

Jesus to the first leaders of the New Testament Church. Waiting upon the Holy Spirit's presence and empowerment is essential for spiritual renewal.

So often, church leaders say that they want change, but they fail to make themselves available and open to the enabling power and presence of the Holy Spirit, which helps bring about the spiritual renewal that we desire for our churches. We are often distracted by our religious works, which in many cases become a substitute for spending time with God in prayer. No prayer, no power. No power, no renewal, no renewal, no change.

One of the prerequisites for church revitalization is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, which is experienced when we are willing to pause and pray. As mentioned, spiritual renewal which leads to church revitalization begins with the work of the Holy Spirit in the church. Yet confessing that the Holy Spirit is the primary agent of ministry in the church does not mean Christians do not have any responsibility or work to do. Neither does it mean Christians should passively wait for some mystical experience of the Spirit's power, without doing any of the work that we have been instructed to do.

> The insight that we most need to take away from the account of the Pentecostal origins of the church is one that is both simple and profound. When the earliest followers of Jesus literally lost sight of their Lord, they did not rush to attend a seminar on what to do next. Nor did they cling for all their worth to the time-tested structures of Judaism. To be sure, the disciples later organized themselves and set out to spread the gospel throughout the known world, but they did not do it initially. Initially, they did one thing, they tarried together in prayer.[11]

The Holy Spirit in Prayer

> Once we recognize that the Holy Spirit is our primary source and hope for church revitalization, the first step in the quest for revitalization is plain to see. Before we

[11] Jason E. Vickers, *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 43.

> turn to prophetic leaders and movements or existing structures for help, we need to commit ourselves to the hard work of tarrying together in prayer. To be sure, the suggestion that we should begin our quest for renewal by waiting together in prayer will strike some as hopelessly mundane. Surely the importance of prayer is obvious to even the conventionally pious. Surely this is tantamount to saying we ought to put gas in the car before we set out on a trip.[12]

Many churches today want to experience revitalization but fail to make time and space for prayer! There seems to be a casual expectation of prayer in our churches. We include prayer to say we have done it, but we do not invest in prayer long enough to see God do it! We often keep prayer short so that we can get to the more matters of the church. What is the rush? Years ago in the African American Pentecostal church, they would say we need to tarry (wait) on God for the Holy Spirit's power and presence to meet us! In today's church, it has become so easy to move on to the more important things. If we want to see and experience spiritual renewal in our stagnant churches, we must do more than include prayer, we must take the time to invest (wait on God) in prayer.

The work of waiting on God together in prayer is not something to be taken lightly. Indeed, to tarry together in prayer is to admit that we are out of answers and that we have lost confidence in the ability of marketing schemes, new technology, and fund-raising campaigns to save us. It is to turn our attention heavenward and ask God, the Father, once again to pour out the Holy Spirit as promised by the Son.

> The church that truly yearns for renewal will commit herself to one thing above all else, she will invite the Holy Spirit to come, and she will do so continuously until the Spirit shows up. She will do so at the outset of every worship service, staff meeting, educational offering, and in every other phase of her life. Her constant prayer will be "Come, Holy Spirit." Her life will be one continuous epiclesis.[13]

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[12] Vickers, *Minding the Good Ground,* 44.

[13] Vickers, *Minding the Good*, 45.

"And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness" (Acts 4:31).

This passage follows an account of the early persecution, of the believers. Even though these believers were challenged by the recent persecution, they still gathered for corporate prayer, confessing God's sovereignty, and praying for boldness to be witnesses for Christ. God's immediate answer to their prayer is given in Acts 4:31 which states, "And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness."

The focus of Acts 4:23-31 is not on the temporary and extraordinary shaking of the place, but on the two results, specifically that all the believers (including but not limited to the apostles) were filled with the Holy Spirit, and that they continued to witness with boldness. The filling of the Holy Spirit is evidenced here as a fresh deepened experience of the personal presence of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer.

As a result of the Spirit's filling, the believers spontaneously spoke the Word with boldness. They were revived, we could say revitalized, by a fresh filling of the Holy Spirit, which spontaneously motivated them with boldness in gospel ministry. Therefore, we can conclude that while we are waiting for the Spirit's presence and power (empowerment), we should be busy, like the early believers, with prayers that confess God's sovereignty.

> Charles Finney has said that sinners are not won through preaching alone, but through preaching and prayer, particularly Spirit-inspired prayer. The Baptism in the Spirit is the key to empowered prayer. Finney said that one of the consequences of being filled with the Holy Spirit is that one will be useful to God,

> even if he is invalid, for he will have power in prayer. This union with God through the Holy Spirit is the most important condition of answered prayer.[14]

> Church leaders cannot give new life or produce revival, but they can work and pray in faith. In Acts 4:23-31, the believers prayed for power to do what they had been commanded to do and were busy doing. Thus, church leaders can pray for grace, power, and courage to do what will hopefully lead to church revitalization. Confessing in prayer that they cannot produce revival or revitalize churches, places them and their ministries under the sovereignty of God.[15]

Church leaders and movements can be and often are gifts of the Holy Spirit in and through which the Spirit works to encourage and correct the church as she goes on her way. Church leaders must always be cognizant of the fact that while God uses us, we do not have the power to breathe new life into the church. That is God's choice! Leaders must always be on guard against the tendency to forget that the ultimate resource for church renewal and revitalization is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our midst. While we are waiting for the power of the Holy Spirit to move and work in our context, we must be diligent in prayer and declaring the word of God. Passionate prayer for the Spirit's divine work is the pattern of the Early Church in the Book of Acts and it is a pattern that we too must follow for revitalization.

> If the church will commit itself to the work of tarrying together in prayer, then we will prepare the way for the Holy Spirit to work through church leader, movements, and through ecclesial structures to make us one, holy, catholic, and apostolic; to enable us to proclaim the pure word of God and rightly to administer the sacraments; and to make us a light to the nations, a city on a hill, the branches of the true vine, and the spotless bride of Christ, Even so, come Holy Spirit."[16]

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[14] Gresham, *Charles G. Finney's Doctrine,* 45, 47.

[15] DeVries, *Divine Empowerment*, 3.

[16] Vickers, *Minding the Good Ground*, 46.

The Holy Spirit in Preaching (The Word)

Acts 2:14 states, "But Peter, standing with the eleven raised his voice and addressed them, Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say."

> Though John Calvin's contributions are misunderstood by many, his explanation of the inseparable relationship of the Spirit and Word of God resonates with the biblical record and remains unsurpassed. As Calvin taught in many places, the communication of the gospel is made effective only when the Holy Spirit joins himself with the Word. Furthermore, in relation to missional ministry and the Spirit's evangelistic conviction, J.H. Bavinch (1960) explains that the Holy Spirit: convinces man of sin, even where previously no consciousness of sin was apparently present. The Holy Spirit uses the word of the preacher and touches the heart of the hearer, making it accessible to the word of God. Thus, the Word of God is the primary means of the Holy Spirit's work. There are many modes of how the Word can be communicated, preaching, teaching, counseling, evangelism, etc. But the method of the Holy Spirit's work with the Word of God remains essential.[17]

One of the most effective means of preparing a church for an experience of revitalization is through biblical preaching. Biblical preaching can help the membership of the church see and understand principles and how those principles can apply to their lives. While good biblical preaching is critical to opening the door to spiritual renewal and revitalization, it is the Holy Spirit's presence and power mixed with the word of God that moves us beyond the open door and invites the church in to experience spiritual renewal.

"It was Phillips Brooks who emphasized in his Beecher lectures on preaching that preaching was one of the best means of communicating God's truth to persons through a person. He declared his confidence in God's power to change persons through the

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[17] DeVries, *Divine Empowerment*, 5.

preaching of God's good news. The neglect of biblical preaching weakens the witness of the church because it violates the biblical image of the ministry."[18]

> It was through preaching that the was church planted in a pagan world. It was through preaching that the church renewed in the sixteenth century. It was through preaching that the dreadful social conditions were corrected in eighteenth-century England. One important factor in our modern crusade for revitalization in the church is biblical preaching. Preaching alone is not enough to sustain revitalization over a long period, but it is a critical element of any revitalization effort.[19]

There is a need for a biblical approach to church revitalization. This biblical approach can be conveyed to the people of God through biblical preaching and teaching (Bible study). The Bible, the inspired word of God, contains the principles necessary for lasting spiritual renewal.

If we believe this statement to be true, then it has to be the responsibility of leadership and the membership to work together, to make sure that there is a priority placed upon the authority of the scripture and the preaching of God's word. Therefore, this must be clearly communicated not only is the vision statement at the entrance on the church walls but in the daily administration of the church ministry.

> Charles Finney saw the Baptism in the Holy Spirit not only as the means of entire sanctification" but also as an enduement of power for ministry. This Baptism gives the believer "power to prevail with God and man." Power to prevail with man refers to empowered preaching, the power to fasten saving impressions upon the minds of men, that is, preaching which has the power to secure the conviction and conversion of its listeners.[20]

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[18] Norman Shawchuck and Lloyd M. Perry, *Revitalizing the Twentieth Century Church* (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1982), 113-114.

[19] Shawchuck and Perry, *Revitalizing the Twentieth Century Church,* 114.

[20] Gresham, *Charles Finney's Doctrine*, 40.

"For Finney, the essential for ministerial success, which he emphasized with great force in several writings, was the enduement of power from on high" through the Baptism of the Holy Spirit.[21] Finney's own experience bore this out. As a result of the overwhelming baptisms of the Holy Ghost following his conversion, Finney claimed "I immediately found myself endued with such power from on high that a few words dropped here and there to individuals were means of their immediate conversion."[22]

> Finney's preaching was powerful, and his evangelism was successful. One writer claimed that during the year 1857-58, over a hundred thousand persons were led to Christ as the direct or indirect result of Finney's labors while five hundred persons professed conversion to Christ in the great revival which began in his meetings. It was found by actual research that over eighty-five in every hundred persons professing conversion to Christ in Finney's meetings remained true to God. While these figures may be somewhat exaggerated and are impossible to verify, they illustrate the high evaluation often given of Finney's power as an evangelistic preacher, a power he attributed to the anointing of the Holy Spirit.[23]

It is the Holy Spirit in partnership with our preaching that is the catalysis that creates revitalization in the church. One of the problems that the church is facing today is the loss of the prophetic voice of preaching. Preaching that speaks directly to the spiritual issues that are at the core stagnant and dead churches. Preaching in some spaces has become secondary, even non-essential, in some circles and methods. Yet the proclamation of God's word inspired by the Holy Spirit remains a sign of health. Healthy believers love biblical preaching and biblical preaching is a primary agent of church revitalization.

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[21] Gresham, *Charles Finney's Doctrine*, 40.

[22] Gresham, *Charles Finney's Doctrine*, 40.

[23] Gresham, *Charles Finney's Doctrine,* 41.

Conclusion

The church, if not careful, can be consumed by fear and anxiety about the future of the church. This many times will cause us to instinctively want to seize control of the circumstances that arise. We then can begin to believe that there are no problems that we cannot fix. Thus, when faced with church stagnation, decay, or decline, we launch fund-raising campaigns; we preach on the importance of tithing; we update the technology; we change the worship; we rearrange the furniture; we wear name badges for visitors; we relocate; we hire staff; we abandon Sunday School; we begin new outreach programs; we reemphasize the need to serve the poor in our communities; and on and on it goes. We often proceed as though there is nothing wrong that money and our efforts cannot fix. We forgot that the church is a faith community whose life is dependent on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

Pastors and churches that desire spiritual renewal, which leads to church revitalization, must live with a constant conviction that the preached word is futile without an open and yielded life to the Holy Spirit. It has no power (inner ability) to bring about spiritual renewal, which leads to church revitalization.

Jason Vickers notes:

> Ecclesial structures are gifts of the Holy Spirit in and through which the Spirit works to incorporate us into the Trinitarian life of God. Yet ecclesial structures are not themselves the Holy Spirit. In and of themselves, they do not have the power to breathe new life into the church. This does not mean that the Spirit cannot work through ecclesial structures to renew the church. Rather, it simply means that we need to be on guard against our tendency to forget that the ultimate resource for revitalization is not our structures, but the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our midst.[24]

[24] Vickers, *Minding the Good Ground*, 49.

Church leaders who desire to see and experience spiritual renewal in their contexts need not only the power and presence of the Holy Spirit. They also need the power and presence of personal accountability by their peers. This presence of personal accountability helps to be a constant reminder of the leader's inadequacy to bring about revitalization in their own strength. This accountability helps to be a constant reminder that partnership with God's strength is what will provide spiritual renewal and revitalization.

> How then should church leaders work for the revitalization of their churches? Since church revitalization is ultimately the work of the Holy Spirit, they should first confess his sovereignty and learn to depend more consistently on him in their ministry. A life of personal and corporate prayer is often the best means to constantly train our minds to confess the Spirit's sovereignty in practical ways. They should analyze their ministry methods to ensure they are based on biblical principles and are consistent with a biblical doctrine of the Holy Spirit. As the church confesses their dependence on the Holy Spirit and as they are faithful in ministry God may sovereignly choose to work repentance and revitalization in the church.[25]

Now is the time for the church to cry out to God for the infilling and enabling presence and power of the Holy Spirit to flood our hearts. So that we, like the New Testament church of Acts (Acts 1:8), too, would experience spiritual renewal through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. So, we say come Holy Spirit come!

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[25] DeVries, *A Divine Empowerment*, 7.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

I currently serve in a church that has existed for over twenty-four years and has become stagnant and plateaued. The church needs revitalization and spiritual renewal. When I speak of revitalization, I am speaking of the process of leading the church and its members to a place of better spiritual health. I will be reflecting more deeply on the role that new models of discipleship through prayer, preaching, teaching, and service (evangelism) play in revitalization. I believe that a carefully thought-out discipleship model, using these practices of prayer, biblical preaching, and service (evangelism), can position the church to experience spiritual health (growth) leading to renewal/change.

Interdisciplinary Field

Benjamin once said that in this world, nothing is certain but death and taxes. A third certainty now asserts itself into our daily reality, change! Change is an inescapable part of all our lives. There is no going back. Things will not slow down. We will not exhaust this period of upheaval in history and revert to the simple life. Change is here to stay!

Change is now the law of life. In an excellent article, “Your Job is Change,” Robert Reich wrote, “Companies that can’t change in this new environment can’t play in the new economy. Companies that can’t change the way they think about change won't be

able to change the way that they compete…. Companies that want to prosper over the long term need to practice the art of continuous change. This is equally true of not-for-profit organizations, clubs, institutions, and yes, even churches."[1] The truth is that transformation is non-negotiable for the Christian Church. However, change is not the norm for many churches. We are supposed to see transformation, but, too often, we only see stagnation.

> The word change strikes fear into the minds and hearts of some people. To others, it brings a ray of hope. This dichotomy will exist until the end of time. "There's no way to avoid it. Changes are going to take place at an increasing rate. Everyone is affected. It is happening in every industry and business. It is happening in every governmental organization and every home. And those who are in charge must know how to decide on changes and implement them effectively or they will fail. The principles for doing it are quite simple, the applications of the principals are not so easy.[2]

The interdisciplinary theme that intersects and informs my project on revitalization is organizational change theory. The more I research this area of organizational change and church revitalization and renewal, the more I can see where they intersect and are both impacted by change theory. These various aspects of organizational change theory also speak to the importance of the growth and development of a church organization that also needs to experience change (renewal). "The Christian approach and the secular approach to change do have some aspects in common when it comes to change management, but the main difference is that Christians see change as coming through the will and power of God, and the secular approach believes in the

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[1] Hans Finzel, *Change is Like a Slinky: Thirty Strategies for Promoting and Surviving Change in Your Organization* (Chicago, IL: Northfield Publishing, 2004), 72.

[2] Donald L. Kirkpatrick, *How To Manage Change Effectively* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc. Publishers, 1985), 9.

efficacy of change management theories and techniques to produce a brighter, better, successful future."[3]

Organizational change is a theory that lies at the foundation of successful organizations and churches in search of change/renewal. The ideologies, theories, and practices of organizational change share some of the principles used for church revitalization and renewal. This interdisciplinary foundation chapter seeks to show that the discipline of organizational change theory intersects and informs church revitalization/renewal. I will seek to elaborate on organizational change theory by defining organizational change and, identifying key factors, the role of the change leader/agent, and the conflict/resistance that comes with organizational change.

Defining Organizational Change

> Change is a fact of modern and post-modern life. It can hurt us or help us. We can react to it as fast as it comes our way or be leaders in cycles of change. We probably all know the meaning of the word change, but here is a refresher on the depths of this little word that upsets the norm in our lives. According to the dictionary, change means, literally, "to exchange" as in one thing for another. That is just what we do. The old is given up and the new arrives, whether we like it or not. Change could be defined to make different; to make radically different; to transform; to give a different position, course, or direction; to make a shift; to undergo modification; to pass from one phase to another; to undergo transformation, transition, or substitution.[4]

Accepting this definition of change means that our churches must be open-minded to the various ways that change is experienced and affects our everyday lives.

> Change has many applications in our daily lives! Consider the many ways changes can and should affect our lives:
> - Change is about courage.

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[3] Justin Thorpe Mason, *The Role of The Holy Spirit in Learning Ecclesial Change in Luke-Acts* (Wake Forest, NC: Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 18.

[4] Hans, Finzel, *Change Is Like a Slinky*, 21.

- Change is about hope.
- Change is about taking risks.
- Change is about having fun.
- Change is about survival.
- Change is about the future.
- Change is about getting comfortable with the uncomfortable.
- Change is about how to make great things happen in your organization.
- Change happens over and over again in a never-ending cycling spin.[5]

> The foundation of organizational change derived originally from Kurt Lewin. The beginnings of organizational change were founded in organizational development, which emerged out of human relations studies from the 1930s when psychologists realized that organizational structures and procedures influenced worker behavior and motivation. In 1961, Richard Beckherd described organizational development as a planned, system-wide change program that used behavioral science knowledge to move the organization to a new "state."[6]

A question that is often asked when addressing the subject of revitalization, particularly in church organizations is do we have to change to experience spiritual renewal? Because many people want renewal, they want change but do not want to let go of the practices they have become accustomed to. This is an age-old problem that has hindered churches from experiencing spiritual and numerical growth for years! Our failure to be open to change, open to something new! Churches that desire to experience revitalization, must at some point take an honest look at themselves and decide whether they want spiritual life or death. Choosing life means choosing change!

> Do organizations really change from the post-World War II years to the late 1970s, this question is central to the reflection on organizational change and is framed in terms of adaptation. For most of this period, the answer to this question is a resounding yes. There is little doubt in most practitioners' and scholars' minds that organizations really can change deliberately and that their main goal is adaptation through growth. Growth and development are the preferred terms for talking about change. For example, Child and Kiesler, in their 1981 review of the

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[5] Hans and Finzel, *Change is Like a Slinky*, 21.

[6] Mason, *The Role of The Holy Spirit,* 10.

> field, define development very broadly as a change in an organization's condition over time.[7]

> In the American culture, there is a positive value attached to bigness and growth. Consequently, an organizational ideology is that organizations should grow and expand to 'justify their existence.' In a competitive environment, organizational members may feel that their organization must grow faster and bigger than other organizations. This is a motive similar to those held by members of 'true' religious faiths or 'correct' political doctrines.[8]

I agree to some extent, but not sold with this thought concerning religious faiths having similar ideologies concerning bigness and growth. I also disagree because I have found that while some members believe that a church organization should grow and know that this is the politically correct thing to say. There are some, particularly the older members, that are stuck and stagnant. They are fine just where they are and with the way things are. They do not see or have this same urgency for change which opens the door to growth!

According to Bob Dylan:

> He who is not busy being born is busy dying.' A similar belief is that if organizations do not expand, they contract. In other words, organizations cannot stand still-they must grow or die. As opposed to this defensive analogy, another more humanistic ideology is that organizations, like individuals, should continually strive to utilize their fullest potential, which most often means expanding. This ideology can be thought of as organizational self-realization.[9]

It is amazing to me how this same ideology functions in the church when we talk about the subject of revitalization or spiritual renewal. It appears that the church would often rather suffer the loss of an opportunity for renewal and growth to maintain the

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[7] Christiane Demers, *Organizational Change Theories A Synthesis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 1.

[8] Len Sperry, *You Can Make It Happen: A Guide to Self-Actualization and Organizational Change* (Boston, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977), 42.

[9] Sperry, *You Can Make Things Happen*, 42.

security and comfort of a familiar structure or process. It also seems easier to do nothing than to do something, especially if doing something might create change or disorder. The church and organizations must be cautious that the need for this stability and regularity does not become a commonly accepted condition that works against the church and keeps the church stagnant.

Leading Organizational Change

Many Christian congregations in America today need to experience life-giving transformation. They need revitalization. Even though the need is urgent many churches are not embracing the reality that they need change, and what needs to be done to experience transformation. Many churches have made attempts to revitalize but in some cases, they have faced resistance or have not had the results they were hoping for. Often when churches do not see the expected results they become discouraged and give up. The good news is that God is always willing and able to bring change to both people and congregations.

> Regarding organizational change, most agree that change is not managed; it must be led. Leaders themselves are the agents of change and play a critical role in the transformation process. The literature is clear that one does not manage change. Change is more a matter of leadership ability than a management skill. To ensure the success of an organizational change effort, the leader in the organization must lead. Many things can be delegated, but, in the change process, leadership is not one of these things. The leader must lead with both commitment and skill.[10]

> The ability to effectively lead and manage organizational change is one of the most sought-after skills among managers and leaders working in today's organizations. In a study conducted for the Society for Human Resource Management by Schramm and Phil (2010), senior leaders from across the world were asked to identify and rate the most salient competencies that organizational leaders must possess. Among the list of 18 competencies, leading change was a top competency for senior leaders in Canada (42%), and in emerging economies

[10] Mason, *The Role of The Holy Spirit*, 15.

> of India (36%), and the Middle East and North Africa (44%). Becker (2007) identified 21 competencies that a strategic leader should possess. Although all 21 play a significant role in successful strategic leadership, Becker contends that the one having the highest impact on strategic leadership success is the ability to lead change. It is apparent that the ability to lead change is a coveted skill among today's organizational leaders.[11]
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> In addition to dialogue amongst practitioners about the need for effective change management skills, organizational researchers are also talking about the significance of leading and managing skills and managing effective change. Burke (2011) believes that, when it comes to change, leadership matters. He posits that the ability to lead has a significant influence on organizational change success.[12]

It is interesting to see how organizational change leaders in the corporation play a similar role to the senior pastoral leadership in the church setting. Both are considered change leaders in their settings and are critical to implementing change, which is essential to the success of their organizations.

Biblical Foundations Intersection/Ezekiel a Change Leader

In the Biblical Foundations Chapter, I mention how Ezekiel's leadership role is critical to the dry bones of Israel coming alive again. I stated that one recurring element we see in the visual narrative of Ezekiel 37:1-10 and reflected in the interpretation narrative (vv. 11-14) is the prominent role played by Ezekiel, as a willing agent of change. He is not merely an observer in this narrative, but an active participant in the restoration of God's people. Just as God desires to revive his people and needs a prophet, God desires to revive and transform his church; therefore, calling for a change leader like Ezekiel who would be willing to actively participate.

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[11] David B. Szabla, *Connecting Organizational Change Strategy: Has Theory Become Practice* (Boston, MA: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2014), 100.

[12] Szabla, *Connecting Organizational Change*, 100.

There is a clear similarity between Ezekiel's role as a change leader and the change leaders needed in today's organizations. They both must speak to and implement change. God desired change for his people, sits Ezekiel down in the valley of dry bones (Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven), and challenges him to speak to the dry bones! Like Ezekiel, organizational and church change leaders are responsible for leading the people and organizations from stagnation and defeat to a place of change (renewal) and victory!

"There is no more powerful engine driving an organization toward excellence and long-range success than an attractive, worthwhile, achievable, vision for the future, widely shared."[13]

> Successful change leaders must be willing to dream the impossible and have a vision for what their organization could become. Accepting and implementing change begins with a vision for change! The future is not what it used to be. More and more people are agreeing, 'If we don't change, we will die!' We must accept that where we are today is not where we need to be for the future. A map for a change plan begins with 'reality therapy', taking stock of the present to prepare for the future. That's how organizational change begins. We must be willing to lay everything on the drawing board as we face the future.[14]

> One of the best statements about vision has been articulated by James O'Tool (1999): A robust vision mobilizes appropriate behavior. It uses memorable, simple concepts that make clear what needs to be different about tomorrow. It describes the distinctive competencies needed to deliver on the desired end state (for example, 'Here's what we have to do differently to succeed'). Often, a vision will make choices clear by making the case for change as either an opportunity or a burning platform (for example, 'If we don't change in this way, the company won't survive').[15]

"Leaders don't even have to create visions themselves (although many do). But, at a minimum, they must initiate a process for developing a vision and then engage

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[13] Hans and Finzel, *Change is Like a Slinky*, 81.

[14] Hans and Finzel, *Change Is Like a Slinky*, 26.

[15] W. Warner Burke, *Organization Change Theory and Practice* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, Inc., 2018), 331-332.

themselves fully in generating buy-in, Shared commitment to a vision can be built either through wide-scale participation in the act of its creation or through involvement immediately thereafter in its dissemination."[16]

> Wherever you find yourself in an organization, on the bottom, somewhere in middle management, or at the top, there is always more room for more dreamers, because dreamers think about the future and the what-ifs. Dreams drive change. Without a hope for a better future, there is no need to change. Those who resist change are the ones who are in love with the status quo. They thrive on the past more than they envision the future. When a leader gets right down to being a change agent, it all begins with dreams. Leaders must accept that change strategy is a fundamental building block to figure out where we would like to be. If we always do what we always did, we'll always get what we always got.[17]

> The attitude of the leader toward other persons is probably more critical than the change itself. This is important to remove feelings of insecurity that often accompany change. The leader needs to introduce support and help. Complete communication is needed to keep people fully informed about the objectives and procedures of the change. The process of change is helped when the employees who will be affected can participate in the decision-making process and in planning for the change. The most important task of the leader is to create the climate in which people feel that the leader has empathy for them.[18]

Having visions or dreaming is critical to change. In the visionary scene of Ezekiel 37:1-6, God invites Ezekiel to participate in the vision rather than simply observing it. My Biblical Foundations Chapter, discusses how God gave Ezekiel a vision/dream, placed Ezekiel in the valley of dry bones, and challenged his ability to dream and see beyond what was before him (dry bones/Israel) to what could be (revived/restored).

God asked Ezekiel if he thought these dry bones could live? God pulled vision out of Ezekiel! God then told Ezekiel to prophesy and speak life into those dry bones, and

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[16] Burke, *Organization Change Theory,* 332.

[17] Hans and Finzel, *Change Is Like a Slinky*, 26.

[18] Donald L. Kirkpatrick, *How to Manage Change Effectively* (San Francisco, CA: Joey-Bass Publishers, 1985), 29.

they began to take on flesh and live! It all started with having a vision that the dry bones could be revived! God gives Ezekiel a lesson on the importance of dreaming or having a vision of what could be, and seeing the bones being revived and coming alive again. Like Ezekiel and today's change leaders, we must remember to dream. Having vision, seeing forward, and saying what if is critical to the leader who implements change in an organization. Like Ezekiel, God gives leaders and pastors a vision for the transformation of their local church and the role they must play in that transformation (change). God calls pastors to begin preaching life-giving messages that are used in the spiritual transformation of the people and the church they serve.

Historical Foundations Intersection/Seymour's Vision for Change

Another intersection of the secular and the sacred can be found in my historical chapter which discusses change leaders Martin Luther and William Seymour and their ability to be agents in leading change. I write about William Seymour and his desire and vision for change, something different, something more powerful (the Holy Spirit).

The Protestant Reformation began with Martin Luther in Wittenberg, Germany, in a broken-down building in the public square, a modest beginning for a revival that impacted and shook the whole world. D'Aubigne described that place as in the middle of the square at Wittenburg stood an ancient wooden chapel, thirty feet wide, whose walls, propped up on all sides, were falling into ruin. An old pulpit made of planks, and three feet high, received the preacher. This is how God would restore God's glory and bring about change, in the most modest of surroundings.

It was a few hundred years later, on a dead-end street in the middle of the industrial section of Los Angeles, California, the Pentecostal movement began in a humble, former Methodist church building at 312 Azusa Street. In the modest building, an unassuming group of racially mixed folk who were hungry for the presence of God and change would experience the Pentecostal fire falling upon them. The leader was not a theologian with a compelling presence or a commanding speech. He was a humble, one-eyed black man with a light beard and face scared by smallpox who came from Houston, Texas with the Pentecostal message burning in his heart.

This was William J. Seymour, the change leader and catalyst of Pentecost and the Azusa Street Revival. Amazingly, both transformative movements (The Reformation and the Azusa Street Revival) began with willing change leaders. Both movements began with leaders who were open to experiencing something different that has affected generations!

> Change is sometimes important because it provides opportunities for growth, development, increasing resources, and seizing a moment that if missed may have negative consequences. Leaders who are frozen in the process of implementing change, who are not able to act efficiently and effectively in bringing an innovative idea into practice soon enough, may be unable to realize the benefits of even the best of ideas. In some cases, being second or third with a great idea is worthless; in some cases, resources are so scarce and timing so critical that delays in getting innovation up and running can mean a missed opportunity. If companies, governments, organizations, and other collectives who are trying to innovate are not able to swiftly and smoothly bring new ideas into the marketplace or operations, the window for innovation may close. Successful implementation is the key to realizing the potential of most great ideas! This Implementation entails the specific and visible actions taken to make the vision a reality.[19]

[19] Laurie K. Lewis, *Organizational Change: Creating Change Through Strategic Communication* (Malden, MA: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd. Publication, 2011), 2.

In the Biblical Foundations Chapter, it discusses how Ezekiel was successful in implementing a vision that brought about change and restoration for Israel. Ezekiel's obedience to implement and obey the vision given to him by God, and prophesy to the dry bones to live, is similar to this secular concept of companies having a vision and implementing their ideas to see productivity. Churches are no different, as they implement their vision, with the help of their members, to see goals accomplished.

Ezekiel 37:7-8: "So I prophesied as I was commanded, there was a noise and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone." "Indeed, as I looked, sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over, but there was no breath in them." "The prophetic oracle in verse seven triggers a movement from the disorientation to the reorientation. Ezekiel discharges his strange commission, and the ensuing silence is broken by a rattling sound as the bones realign themselves into skeletons. Then, before his wondering eyes, they turn into bodies, in step with the stages of his oracle. First sound, then sight; Ezekiel's senses are bombarded with an overwhelming experience."[20] This is the implementation of and obedience to vision. What the secular (companies) calls the implementation of the vision, the sacred (the church) calls obedience to God.

When Ezekiel yields to what God commands, Ezekiel experiences the power of God's spirit performing and producing surgery before his very eyes. The bones begin to come together themselves in the proper order, and then align themselves with flesh. This context or setting in which we see the results of vision being implemented is similar to the type of results that secular companies want to see when they implement their

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[20] Leslie C. Allen, *Word Biblical Commentary: Ezekiel 20-48* (Dallas, TX: Word Book, 1990), 185.

vision/ideas. They want to see success! The prophet Ezekiel is then ordered to prophesy to the Spirit, which enters the bones and revives them. God displays to Ezekiel the power of his word and the power of his obedience to God's word. It is Ezekiel's willingness and obedience to God's word that sets in motion the display of God's work. To secular organizations, this is simply a vision being implemented and producing change.

In his book, *Leading Change*, John Kotter, a frequent speaker at conferences, and a consultant, draws on his experiences of discussing cases of organizational change with participants in executive programs. He declares that leading change consists of an eight-stage process:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency. Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities.
2. Creating the guiding coalition. Putting together a group that will work like a team with enough power to lead the change.
3. Developing a vision and strategy. Getting a vision and creating strategies for achieving that vision.
4. Communicating the change vision. Using every vehicle possible to communicate the new vision and strategies.
5. Empowering broad-based action. Getting rid of obstacles and changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision.
6. Generating short-term wins. Planning for visible improvements in performance or wins! Recognizing and rewarding people who made wins possible.
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change. Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don't fit together and fit the transformation vision.
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture. Developing means to ensure leadership development and succession.

> Kotter states that an examination of these stages reveals two important patterns. First, useful change tends to be associated with a multistep process that creates power and motivation sufficient to overwhelm all the sources of inertia. Second, this process is never employed effectively unless it is driven by high-quality leadership, not just excellent management.[21]

[21] John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), 22.

Change leaders need to remember that whatever process or systems we use to bring about successful change and transformation will require time and patience. Change leaders must always remember that significant, sizable change is never easy, it will take hard work!

Resistance to Change

"Attempts to change are almost always certain to encounter obstacles from the organized resistance of individuals or groups inside and outside the organization. An inability to change may be the result of conditions operating inside the people, acting as mental blinders to thinking or behavior. Other obstacles originate within the organization regardless of individual flexibility."[22]

The church is not exempt when talking about resistance to change. In my Historical Foundations Chapter, I talk about change leader, William Seymor and how he faced resistance to change in the church as he was leading a new movement, the Azusa Street Revival.

Despite the horrible, racist conditions that Seymour was born into, God in his providence would raise up this young black preacher, born to former slaves, to be the catalyst for a revival, a spiritual movement that would transform lives and bring together people of all types. In the years to come, the Azusa Street Revival, despite being criticized, would have some influence on the racial divide and help to bring people of different races together.

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[22] Sperry, *You Can Make Things Happen,* 44.

People of all types-educated, uneducated, rich, poor, African American, Asians, Hispanics, Whites, men, women, native-born, recent immigrants, and foreign visitors, sang and came to the altar together. In the words of Frank Bartleman, the color line was washed away in the blood. Early photographs clearly show African Americans, whites, men, and women, all in leadership roles. The relaxation of racial and gender barriers represented a threat to many who were committed to the existing status quo. The Azusa Street revival would also help to bring about the persecution of those early Pentecostals as well as the widespread denial of the revival's validity and impact.

> It is not that everybody resists change. Nor is it true that everybody accepts change. It depends on the specific change and how people view it. Some of the reasons have to do with the personal loss or gain that will result from the change. Some of them are tangible such as money, working conditions, and authority. Others are intangible such as contracts, status, recognition, and feelings of importance and security. Some of the expected losses or gains may occur and others may never materialize. But acceptance or resistance will depend largely on what people expect will happen. The most significant reason why people will accept or welcome or will resent or resist the change is related to the word participation. Employees who have not been asked for their input are apt to resent or resist the change if they feel they could have contributed. Employees who have been asked for ideas and suggestions will most likely react positively toward the change that is finally introduced. And it doesn't seem to depend on whether their ideas were used. Rather, it depends on whether their ideas were considered in deciding on the change. Managers and leaders who plan to introduce change should recognize that there will probably be three classes of employees/people: those who will resent or resist, those who will accept or welcome, and those who are neutral.[23]

Theological Foundations Intersection/The Holy Spirit, Change Agent!

Just as Ezekiel and the dry bones of Israel needed to experience the (Ru'ach), the breath/spirit of God, the church today also needs to experience the (Pneu'ma) the Holy

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[23] Donald L. Kirkpatrick, *How to Manage Change Effectively* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1985), 96.

Spirit. At the foundation of the church experiencing change, is the work of the Holy Spirit. In the church, the Holy Spirit is the primary agent of spiritual transformation, therefore church leaders who desire change must cooperate with the workings of the Holy Spirit. We see this cooperation with God and the Spirit of God (Ezekiel 37:9-10, 14) as Ezekiel is called to help bring about change in the valley of the dry bones of Israel. It is the Holy Spirit that empowers people to be change leaders that help to bring about spiritual renewal and transformation in the church.

> The Holy Spirit is the divine agent who produces church revitalization. The Holy Spirit normally uses us as secondary human agents to communicate the Word of God through various modes of ministry. As we confess our dependence on the Holy Spirit as we are faithful in ministry, the Holy Spirit may sovereignly choose to work repentance and revitalization in the church.[24]

Without the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, ministry in the church cannot be effective. The New Testament calls us to walk by the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-16), to be filled with the Spirit (Eph.5:18), and to be co-workers with the Spirit (2 Cor. 6:1). Therefore, trying to achieve change (revitalization) without the help and empowerment that the Holy Spirit provides goes against Jesus' final instructions to the first leaders of the New Testament Church (Acts 1:1-5). This again reiterates the importance of the Holy Spirit as a prerequisite and primary agent of change. By confessing that the Holy Spirit is the primary agent of change in the church does not negate the fact that Christians still have a responsibility to participate in the ministry work needed for change.

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[24] Brian A. Devries, *Divine Empowerment: The Holy Spirt and Church Revitalization* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2015), 2.

The Holy Spirt in Prayer

In my Theological and Historical Chapters, I also mention the importance of prayer preceding the outpouring of the Holy Spirit which led to the Azusa Street revival. William Seymour and other Pentecostal leaders during the Azusa Street revival believed strongly that their coming together in prayer would open the door to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. They were desperate to see and experience change, so they prayed! "Once we recognize that the Holy Spirit is our primary source of hope for church revitalization, the first step in the quest for revitalization is plain to see. Before we turn to prophetic leaders and movements or existing structures for help, we need to commit ourselves to the challenging work of tarrying (waiting) together in prayer."[25]

Many churches today want to experience revitalization and change but fail to make time and space for prayer. There seems to be a casual expectation of prayer in churches. We include prayer to say we have done it, but we do not invest in prayer long enough to see God do it! We often keep prayer short so that we can get to what we think are the more important matters of the church. What is the rush? Years ago, particularly in the African American Pentecostal church, they would say we need to tarry (wait) on God through prayer for the Holy Spirit's presence and power to meet us! Now, I am not advocating that we go back to tarrying, but we do need to go back to trusting and waiting on God through prayer for the Holy Spirit's presence to precede our ministry practices (work).

The work of waiting on God together in prayer is not something to be taken lightly. To tarry (wait) together in prayer is to admit that we do not have the answers and

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[25] Jason E. Vickers, *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 44.

that we have lost all confidence in our marketing schemes, modern technology, and fundraising campaigns to save us. The church must turn its focus towards heavenward and through prayer ask God, to pour out the Holy Spirit! "The church that truly yearns for renewal will commit herself to one thing above all else, she will through prayer invite the Holy Spirit to come, and she will do so continuously until the Spirit shows up. Her constant prayer will be, Come, Holy Spirit Come."[26]

Conclusion

Organizations large or small can conclude that change is inevitable, there is no avoiding change. "The only constant is change"? This is a fact that is, built upon the reality that change is built into life itself. Most of the time we do not even have to do anything to bring about change. Change will happen. Every day, we are bound to face and encounter all kinds of new developments, good and bad. No matter what we do change comes to all of us, and change will find you.

We cannot choose whether change will come or not. We can choose whether to embrace it or resist it. We can choose the kind of change that advances the kingdom of God into our world, or we can retreat into a subculture that attempts to insulate us from the world. In our day, we face an opportunity for change that can deliver transformation to individuals, churches, and whole communities. Will we engage? Or will we resist? What will the church do?

> Change is a prominent feature of our lives and the character of many organizations. Changes come in all sizes and configurations from small procedural changes within given units or departments, initiated with no or little formality, to large-scale multi-organizational, multi-part change efforts with uncertain ends. Successful mastery over change is a subject that has received a

[26] Vickers, Minding the Good, 45.

> great deal of attention in scholarly and popular press articles and books. Scholars, consultants, and practitioners alike have sought an explanation of how stakeholders can create the most positive implementation processes to bring planned changes to a successful conclusion. The importance of mastering organizational change is due to the magnitude of what can be accomplished if change processes are successful.[27]

My research to this point on organizational change has brought me to conclude that whether change happens immediately or down the road, refusing to own change will ultimately find its way back to you. It is always easiest to own change early in the process when the change is manageable. If you choose not to, it will pick up steam and become more and more uncontrollable, until it is just too much for you to handle! So, Change Now!

[27] Laurie K. Lewis, *Organizational Change: Creating Change Through Strategic Communication* (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 18.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Methodology

The overall revitalization project was successful because all the participants were fully engaged from the beginning information session to the final personal interviews. The project focused on incorporating a new discipleship model using prayer, biblical engagement (Sunday preaching/Wednesday teaching/personal devotional reading), and service (evangelism/outreach) in hopes of reviving a renewed commitment to spiritual health and growth. During the eight-week renewal intensive, the project participants lived out and displayed through greater participation in prayer, Bible engagement (Sunday preaching, Wednesday teaching, personal reading), and service (evangelism/outreach) outside the church. The project is an eight-week church revitalization intensive that focuses on prayer gatherings, biblical engagement (Sunday preaching, Wednesday Bible teachings, devotionals, and service to others (evangelism).

Participating in the spiritual renewal intensive will be twelve preselected designated persons consisting of church leadership and members who will form a small test group of which I will administer surveys, questionaries, and personal interviews before, during, and after the eight-week intensive. In addition to the designated twelve, the church members will also be given the option to participate in the boot camp intensive. While the surveys given to the church will be optional, this specific test group

of twelve will be committed to participating and giving feedback on the project so that we can measure the result. Before participating in the boot intensive, the twelve will be given a survey or questionnaire that looks at their current commitment to prayer, Bible study, Sunday worship, and service (outreach).

Following the eight-week intensive, the church and the project group of twelve will be given a post-intensive survey and personal interviews to see if the intensive affected them in any way or influenced any change in their commitment to prayer, biblical engagement (preaching/teaching, reading) the word of God, Wednesday/Sunday worship, and service (outreach). In the group of sixteen, we had a diverse cross-section of church members who were members of the church for over ten years. I feel that they have seen and experienced the church and ministry during its successes (growth) and stagnation and will be able to give honest insights.

The expected contributions for my project will come from the church leadership and members, context associates, professional associates, and my peer associates. The church leadership and members will contribute by participating in the eight-week revitalization intensive boot camp. They will be asked to participate in prayer calls, Sunday sermons, Wednesday interactive Bible study, Dynamite Prayer devotional reading, Sunday morning weekly debrief sessions, welcome/invitational cards witness challenge, and several service events. They will also be asked to participate in pre- and post-intensive surveys and post-project exit interviews.

The approach to this project was conducted this way because the worship experience and sermon series would provide the instruction and inspiration needed to begin the process of renewal. The interactive teaching and discussion on Wednesday

nights and the interactive weekly summary sessions on Sunday mornings would allow us to learn from the diverse perspectives in the group. The morning prayer calls with devotional reading and corporate prayer would give participants the opportunity to create their own discipline of prayer while growing in confidence to pray with and for others. The twenty-day devotional reading (Dynamite Prayer) was used to allow the participants to make a place and space to be with God through daily reading of scripture, reflective meditation on the reading, and intentionally focused time with God. The invitational cards challenge, and community service opportunities challenge the participants to check their commitment to being a witness to others of Jesus Christ while being challenged to make any necessary changes.

The eight-week spiritual renewal intensive began with Sunday sermons, Monday morning prayer calls, Wednesday night interactive Bible study, and Sunday morning weekly summary discussions. These sessions were created to assist in leading the participants to experience spiritual renewal. The project was organized to facilitate the spiritual renewal of each participant. The hope was that if these participants would engage in an eight-week spiritual renewal intensive through the practice of prayer, biblical engagement (preaching, teaching, reading), and witness (service), they would experience renewal (coming alive again). This renewal, when experienced individually, helps to bring about revitalization to the church. Therefore, each member being renewed individually will impact the church.

Implementation

The project group's formulation began with an email inviting participants to learn about the church's need for spiritual renewal. Due to the potential participants' availability, this took place in two meetings: one in person and the other online. Prospective participants also received a detailed overview of the eight-week project schedule and project responsibilities. They were asked to consider the requirements and respond with whether they would participate or not.

Week One of the Project Intensive (October 4, 2024)

The first week and opening session for the spiritual renewal intensive began with sixteen participants agreeing to commit to the eight-week spiritual renewal intensive. The participants comprised a diverse group of church members, church leaders, and context associates aged thirty to sixty-five (Appendix 3). There were ten African American females, five African American males, and one Caucasian male, male. The participants were ten females and six males. The educational level ranged from high school to postgraduate. The range of years of membership was one to twenty-five years.

The context associates participated from the first project meeting to the final post-project interview. They participate in each week’s spiritual practice. They led and prayed on our prayer calls and assisted in opening and closing our Wednesday and Sunday interactive training and discussion sessions. They also participated in service community outreach and service and journaled each week. They filled out pre- and post-questionnaires. One of our context associates taught one of the Sunday morning sermons and led our Monday morning devotion and prayer.

All the professional associates had an opportunity to share with our project group in some capacity. Two of the project associates lead our Monday devotional and prayer sessions. The other professional associate taught one of our Wednesday interactive Bible studies on "The Value of the Word of God." Project associates also meet with me before the first project session to discuss the project and its effectiveness.

Week One: Spiritual Renewal

Week One began with our Wednesday Interactive Bible study. The interactive Bible study would allow me to teach the opening topic and allow an opportunity for the project participants to share their thoughts on the subject. We opened the session with prayer and the reading of the project's biblical foundation scripture, Ezekiel 37:1-14. The sermon title and scripture text for the teaching was "Spiritual Renewal" Keys to Experiencing Renewal" in Psalm 51:1-13. We defined the word renewal. Then, I shared with them some signs of needing renewal, which included loss of convictions, healthy boundaries, discernment, and submitting to fleshly desires. We then shared the importance of Spiritual Renewal, some keys to experiencing renewal, and what it involves. The renewal begins inwardly, and the scripture references were Psalms 51:10, 1 Samuel 16:7, and 2 Corinthians 4:16. Renewal involves repentance according to Psalm 51:1-2. Renewal requires acknowledgment of your sins, as indicated in Psalm 51:3-4. Renewal requires desiring truth, according to Psalm 51:6 and John 8:32. Renewal requires receptivity to the word of God, according to Psalm. Renewal requires applying the word of God (read it, meditate on it, confess it, believe it, Obey/do it).

After the conclusion of the Bible teaching, we began to collectively discuss the teaching and its implications while gathering their thoughts. Following the interactive discussion, we began going over the details of the eight-week intensive, sharing the weekly spiritual practices and ministry events that the participants would have to commit to and participate in. The twenty-eight-day dynamite prayer devotional book was also given to the participants as part of their spiritual renewal intensive. We read and explained in detail the consent forms and allowed the participants to ask any questions. Four journal questions would also be given to the project group to help guide their journaling for week one. This same week, the pre-project questionnaires were sent out, and all participants filled them out before the first session. The pre-project questionnaire focused its questions on the participant's spirituality and commitment to the spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement, and witness (service/outreach). The goal was to see if the participants were spiritually stagnant and needed to experience spiritual renewal. On Sunday of this week, we met in our first early morning interactive discussion session, which allowed us to discuss the first week's events. This interactive time would prove to be a valuable instrument in the renewal-intensive process.

Week Two: The Value of Prayer

The second week began with the Sunday morning worship service. During the service, the biblical foundation scripture reading of Ezekiel 37:1-14 and a brief exhortation on our need to move from a place of stagnation spiritually to a place of renewal (a coming alive again). The sermon title was “The Value/Power of Prayer, Keys to Effective Prayer.” The scripture text was Nehemiah 1:1-11. This title and sermon were

chosen because of its focus on Nehemiah praying before strategizing and pursuing his plans to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. The overall focus of the sermon was how Nehemiah focused on the importance of prayer and turned to prayer first before strategizing to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. This prayer was the first spiritual practice Nehemiah engaged in to experience the renewal and strength he needed after hearing the discouraging news of his people and his city in ruins. I proposed to the group that we, like Nehemiah, need to turn to the spiritual practice of prayer to experience the strength we need to overcome life's challenges and accomplish God's plans for us. The key points covered concerning prayer stop and pray (Neh. 1:4), acknowledge God when you pray (Neh. 1:5), confess your sins (Neh. 1:6-7), remind God of the promise, not the problem. (Neh. 1:8-9), and prayer with confident humility (Neh. 1:10-11).

Week two continued on Monday morning with our 6:30 a.m. early morning prayer call in which all participants would come together for a time of devotional reflection and prayer. The scripture devotional came from the twenty-eight-day dynamite prayer devotional that was our daily reading. I opened the prayer call with a reflection scripture, one of the participants prayed, and then I returned and closed the prayer time. This was invaluable because it allowed the participants to participate in the spiritual practice of prayer. Each week a different participant got an opportunity to volunteer and pray. Participants got more comfortable volunteering to pray as the weeks went on. This practice of prayer eventually proved to be beneficial in the participant's experiencing renewal.

Wednesday's Bible study continued to be in-person and interactive. This Bible study differed in that it was held exclusively with the project group from beginning to

end. Other studies were taught to the whole congregation; then, we met with the project group participants for discussion afterward. Interactive Bible studies proved to be much more effective as the participants shared that they learned more when they had an opportunity to hear others share insights while having the opportunity to also give input. The evening started with the participants kneeling at the altar and praying and closing with a hymn before going into our study. The Bible study title and scripture was "The Value of Prayer, Pray Frist" from Daniel 6:1-12. This study was of immense value because it reinforced the fact that the spiritual practice of prayer is critical to renewal. Daniel, through the text, reminded the group that when faced with challenges, we are to prioritize the practice of prayer and make a space and a place to go to God in prayer. It is this emphasis on prayer that gives Daniel the courage to face and overcome the challenge of being thrown into the lion's den. The key points covered concerning Daniel's priority on prayer were prayer must be a priority (Dan. 6:10), prayer needs a place (Dan. 6:10b, and Matt. 6:6), and prayer must be persistent (Dan. 6:10b), prayer must partner with praise (Dan. 6:10), and prayer produces (Dan. 6:28).

After the Bible study teaching, the group began a discussion on how the message impacted them. What stood out to the group was Daniel's intentionality of praying before resorting to doing anything. Daniel would find his way to his room, where scripture records that he prays to God just as he had always done before. Daniel's priority on the practice of prayer prepared him for the later challenge of being thrown into the lion's den. Daneil's example of praying first inspired me to take on that same challenge to always pray first. The group came out of this interactive Bible study discussion motivated to continue the interactive session because it allowed them to discuss the teaching, hear

others' perspectives, and get to their questions in real-time from the pastor. After we closed the interactive session, the group received several questions about the week's events to help guide their journaling for that week. Week two ended with the Sunday morning group check to summarize and discuss the group's experiences from the week.

Week Three: The Value of Prayer

The Sunday sermon title and scripture were "The Value of Prayer, Paying through Pressure," Matthew 26:36-46. The text primarily speaks of how Jesus goes to the garden of Gethsemane with his disciples and chooses the practice of prayer to deal with the pressure of the cross. The main thought that I proposed to the group is how, during times of pressure, Jesus turns to the practice of prayer that brings about the renewal and strength needed to manage the cross. This passage validates the fact that prayer, when utilized, is critical to one's ability to manage life's pressures and bear one's cross. After Jesus prays, scripture records that the angels came and strengthened (revived) him for the task ahead. This implies that prayer can do the same for the believer in need of spiritual renewal. Prayer produces strength; prayer brings about renewal! The key principles covered in the sermon speak to how Jesus utilizes prayer to deal with the pressure of the cross: Jesus sought sacred solitude. We must seek sacred solitude (Matt. 26:36). Jesus seeks support. We must seek out support (Matt. 26:37). Jesus surrenders to God. We must surrender our will to God, ready to Surrender (Matt. 26:39). Watch out for your flesh. We must respond and not react when our flesh seeks to dictate or distract us from our pursuit of prayer (Matt. 26:40-41). Let go of distractions. We cannot allow people or things to become a distraction when committing to the practice of prayer (Matt. 26:43-44). Move

forward. Jesus was willing to move forward and face the challenge of the cross. After praying, we, like Christ, must get up, move forward, and face the challenges before us (Matt. 26:45-46).

Week three continued with our Monday morning prayer call. We began with a reflection scripture, and then one of the participants volunteered to pray, and I closed the group by praying for everyone in the group. Again, the prayer call allowed the group participants to pray and gain confidence in their ability to pray for others. During this time of prayer, the entire group has an opportunity to join in and pray for each other. This time of prayer also encourages the participants in their personal prayer time outside of our group prayer.

The Week Three interactive Bible study continued on the subject of prayer. The title of the teaching was "The Value of Prayer, Prayer Changes Things," and the sermon scripture was Isaiah 38:1-8. This teaching looked at the role that prayer plays in experiencing God's supernatural power-changing circumstances. Hezekiah was told by the prophet Isaiah to get his house (his affairs) in order because he would die. Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed. The one thing that Hezekiah turned to when in need of a miracle was the different aspects of the prayer he prayed. After Hezekiah prayed, God changed his circumstances. This same experience can happen to the believer who needs change. God, through the power of prayer, takes Hezekiah from death to life. The participants were encouraged to see that the same God that changed Hezekiah's circumstances and took him from death to life is the same God that, through prayer, can bring change to any situation. Therefore, if we practice prayer, it can also bring about change in the life of the believer (project participant) and cause them to experience

renewal (coming alive again). The key Bible study principles that we learned from Hezekiah's prayer life, which we can apply to our lives: remove the distractions (Is. 38:2). Hezekiah removes any distractions and gets alone in prayer with God. We must remove the distractions that are vying for our attention and give our full attention to God through prayer, reminding God of the relationship (Is. 38:3), reminding God of our faithfulness to God, staying humble, walking with confidence humility (Is.38:3b), and expect and wait for a word from God (Is. 38:4-5). Just like Hezekiah received a word from God that he stood upon to experience his change, we, too, must do the same and stand upon the word from God. Place your confidence in God for the results (Dan. 38:7). We should pray and leave the results to God.

Once we concluded the study, we engaged in a twenty-minute interactive discussion about the Bible study to see its impact on the project participants. As we discussed this topic of prayer, the participants began to share how, over the past few weeks, and in addition to this teaching, they started to embrace the practice and seek to become more intentional about the daily practice of prayer. I encouraged the participants to do what Hezekiah did and take a moment, remove distractions, and get quiet before God and pray. At week three, I was hoping to begin to see a conative change with some, if not all the participants.

On Sunday morning of week three, we came together again for our weekly check-in to summarize, discuss, and process the week's events (spiritual practices). We also discussed the effectiveness of the twenty-eight-day devotional readings. The participants were given another opportunity to pray and asked to open and close the session in prayer.

During this third week's check-in session, you can begin to see that the project overall is gaining momentum due to the increased excitement and participation of the group.

Week Four: The Value of Prayer Being A Witness for God!

Week four began with us continuing with the subject of prayer. The Sunday morning sermon was entitled "The Power of Prayer and Praise." The sermon scripture lesson for the text was Acts 16:22-36. The sermon was the last teaching about prayer before moving on to the next spiritual practice of witness and service. This sermon was intended to remind the group about the power of prayer. It was also intended to show the project group and congregation that despite our circumstances or conditions, we can turn to the practice of prayer for help from God. Paul and Peter have been persecuted, beaten, and thrown into prison because of their witness and preaching of the gospel. While in prison, Paul and Silas turned to prayer, and their prayer opened the door for them to experience the presence and power of God in their time of need. Here, we find another example in scripture of what happens when we turn to God in prayer. It was noted intentionally that the prayers of Paul and Silas did not have the power to bring about change, but their prayer was the avenue or conduit to experience God's power. It is not our prayer that has the power; it is our prayer that gives us access to God, who has and displays the power needed to experience change. This sermon intended to again validate to the project group that the practice of prayer with their praise to God can bring about renewal and change. The goal of this final teaching about prayer was to reiterate and hopefully cause some type of cognitive change in hopes that the participants would start thinking differently about the practice of prayer. The sermon principles we learned from

Paul and Silas's life varied. God, through prayer, has the power to move/shift things (Acts 16:26a). We must not forget that it is God who has the power to bring about. Our prayer is the vehicle that God uses to access and release that power on the earth. God, through prayer, has the power to open doors and opportunities (Acts 16:26b). Scripture records that God, through the earthquake, opened the doors of the prison cell. Paul and Silas did nothing. There are doors and opportunities that God will open when we pray and get out of the way. God, through prayer, has the power to free or deliver you (Acts 16:26c). There are personal areas of our lives in which we need to experience God's supernatural power to be freed from the addictions and bondages that inhibit us. God, through prayer, has the power to give us peace (Acts 16:36).

On Monday of week four, we joined together on a morning prayer call at 6:30 a.m. and shared a devotional reflection from the twenty-eight-day devotional book, Dynamite Prayer. We read Hosea, 4:6, Matthew 4:4, Hebrews 4:12, and Matthew 22:29. Our reflection was focused on the power of the word of God and how the word of God is essential for the believer. The word is not just for information but also sets the stage for spiritual transformation. The word of God is connected to God's power, and God's power is connected to the word. After the devotional reading and reflection, I opened in prayer, one of our project participants prayed a powerful prayer, then we all prayed in unison, and I closed the prayer. This time of prayer seemed to be very transformational as we prayed together.

Week Four: Being A Witness for God

The week four Bible study teaching transitioned to the spiritual practice of witness (service/outreach). The Bible study title was "Can I Get a Witness?" The scripture lesson was Acts 16:27-36. Initially, this teaching was scheduled to be the third spiritual practice teaching, but I felt the leading of the Holy Spirit to switch it to the second teaching in the series of spiritual practices and teach it before the series on biblical engagement. I also wanted to start this series as we would be going to the North Carolina Diaper Bank for our first witness and service opportunity. I felt this teaching on witness, and service would be a primer to preparing participants to witness and serve. The focus of this teaching was to get the project participants to see how important our witness and service to others is in experiencing spiritual renewal.

Paul and Silas used their circumstance (imprisonment) as an opportunity to be a witness to the jailer who initially put them in prison. Paul and Silas could have run after the prison doors were opened, but they chose to stay to fulfill God's place and purpose to "Be a Witness for God." Paul and Silas's commitment to the spiritual practice of witnessing and serving others challenges the group to take introspection of their willingness to sacrifice their time and witness and serve others. The question that was proposed to the group was can God count on you to be witness for God. The spiritual principles of being a witness from Paul and Silas's prison experience were Paul and Silas showed compassion (Acts 16:28a). Paul and Silas chose to stay, and witness (Acts 16:28b). Paul and Silas saw and seized the opportunity to witness (Acts 16:29-39). Paul and Silas speak up and shred Christ (Acts 16:31-32). Paul and Silas allowed their life and actions to be the witness and speak for them (Acts 16:35-36).

Week four also brought with it a disappointing change in the schedule of events. We were prepared to witness and serve at the Diaper Bank of North Carolina but had to cancel due to Hurricane Helen, which caused major flooding in the mountains. So, our first of two service opportunities was canceled, and we did not reschedule at the diaper bank due to all the spots now being filled, and we could not get another open spot to serve before the eight-week project was over. Several of the group participants were disappointed because we began teaching the spiritual practice of witness through service, and they were anticipating the opportunity to serve others. This excited me because their disappointment in not having an opportunity to witness through service meant they were moving from a place of complacency and comfort to a willingness to witness and serve others.

We added another service opportunity at the local shelter at Oak City Cares in Raleigh, North Carolina, to allow several of the participants who missed the final service opportunity due to prior commitments a chance to fulfill their spiritual practice of witness and service. This may have been providential because the Oak City Shelter was a wonderful experience for the project participants to serve. Not only did we have an opportunity to serve those in need, but we were also able to encourage, pray, and invite people to church.

Week four ended on Sunday morning with our weekly small group check-in. This check-in session stood out among some of the others. It began with one of the participants opening the session in prayer. I could tell by his prayer and the language he used that he had been reading the twenty-eight Dynamite Prayer devotional book. In addition to the teachings of witness and service, I encouraged the group, beginning in

October for our remaining four weeks of the project, to pass out church invitation cards each week to someone according to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. This may open the door for an opportunity to witness, serve someone, or pray for someone. This would support in action what we had been teaching in theory. After making the witness challenge, one of the group participants shared how the Dynamite Prayer Twenty-Eight-day devotional book has been making an impact in his life, causing him to be more aware of his need for spiritual growth. Another participant echoed that the devotionals were helpful in challenging them to witness and share the love of God. They shared how the same subject taught on Wednesday would be a similar topic covered on Thursday in the devotional reading on not being ashamed of sharing the gospel. There would be at least ten participants who shared in the discussion. Each of the participant's responses centered on the need to step up and witness and share God's love more intentionally. The enthusiasm and engagement around this topic of witness and service ensured me that we were turning the corner and participants were grasping and experiencing spiritual renewal.

Week Five: Being A Witness for God.

Week five began on Sunday with the Sunday morning sermon. The sermon title was "Who's Your One." The sermon scripture was Luke 15:1-7. The focus and intent of this message was to remind and reinforce to the project group specifically that we have a responsibility to reach, witness, and serve people. The question was asked to the participants and congregation: who is your one? Who have you reached out to encourage, pray for, or share Jesus Christ with? The text also reminds us that the lost one is most

important to the Kingdom of God and that God's priority is for the lost one. Jesus, in the text, gives us a clear example of the priority of reaching the lost. Jesus leaves the ninety-nine and goes after the one, and when the one that is lost is found, all of heaven rejoices over that one that is found. Therefore, just as Jesus prioritizes the one that is lost, we, like Jesus, must make the sacrifices needed to go after the one that is lost. Christians that have been redeemed and renewed, must make the spiritual practice of witness to the lost a priority. I can confidently say that the Wednesday teachings and Sunday sermons about witnessing and reaching the lost were pivotal messages that became a noticeable turning point for the group. You could sense that the participants were now fully grasping the project focus of spiritual renewal while being transformed and experiencing renewal for themselves.

The text provides several key principles to how Jesus reaches his one, the person who is lost and in need of Jesus Christ by being confident and convinced of what you have to offer (Lk. 15:1); by being approachable and open to receive and speak to people (Lk.15:2-3); by being intentional about reaching the lost (Lk. 15:4); by being willing to help or assist the person who is lost (Lk 15:5); and by being willing to celebrate the lost when they are found (Lk. 15:6-7).

Week Five in October continued with a Monday morning prayer call at 6:30 a.m. We had fourteen participants on the line. This prayer call was different because one of the context associates led our prayer call by opening with a devotional on "Hope in God" and leading the group in prayer. This was a significant moment because it allowed one of my context associates to participate in the project and allowed me to see the development of one of the context associates from the start of the project to this point. At the beginning of

the week, I asked for someone to volunteer to lead us. For someone to feel comfortable enough to step up and volunteer was an indication that some of the group participants were experiencing renewal and becoming confident in their ability to lead others. This is a spiritual quality that could have an impact on the overall church.

Our week five Bible study teaching began in October as we continued teaching on the subject of "Witness." The title and text were "Courage to Witness for God" from Acts 8:26-40. This teaching was important because it supported our subject on witness and gave the project participants another practical example of the importance of our witness and some key aspects of being a witness. Philip's example of being called to the chariot of the Ethiopian eunuch, taking the time to explain the scriptures to him, asking him if he knew Jesus Christ, and providing an opportunity for him to be baptized was a real-life example to the group of the call to being witness. There were key principles to being a courageous witness. Philip was willing to go and obey God's command to witness (Acts 8:26-27). We must see our witnessing as God's call to us to witness. Philip was open to the Holy Spirit's guidance (Acts 8:29). We must allow God to lead us to those who need Christ. Philip intentionally engaged in a conversation (Acts 8:30-31). We must be willing to engage and conversate with all people for the opportunity to witness. Philip was willing to open his mouth and share Jesus Christ (Acts 8:35-37). We must be willing to move beyond conversating and specifically share Christ. The Bible study ended with a thirty-minute interactive discussion of the Bible study and how it spoke to them. We also had testimonials and conversations on the group's personal witnessing experiences during the week. Week five ended with our Sunday morning in-person interactive weekly check-in, in which we summarized the week's experiences regarding witnessing.

Week Six: Being A Witness for God

Week six began with the Sunday morning service. We continued the subject of "Witness." The title and scripture were "Courage to Witness for God, Part II," from Acts 1:8 and John 1:35-42. We defined the word witness and then gave some key foundational and practical principles as to why we are to witness and how we should witness. This was important because it outlined some practical steps they would need to witness to the group effectively. The key lessons were why witness, when witnessing, remember, and the four basic laws of witnessing. Why witness was based in Mark 16:16-16 and we witness because Jesus commanded us to because the world needs the gospel and the good news of Jesus Christ. It is important to know when to witness, realizing that the Holy Spirit is in charge, will guide you, and that the transformational work belongs to the Holy Spirit. Finally, the four basic laws of witnessing are that God loves you and has a plan for your life (Jn 3:16). Humanity is sinful and separated from God (Rom. 3:23). Jesus Christ is God's only Provision for man's sin (Rom. 5:8). We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord; then, we can know God personally and experience God's Love (Jn. 1:12).

The Bible study for week six was an in-person interactive Bible study time with the project group. The congregation was not included online. The group feels that this interactive study time is a more conducive learning environment because it allows them to ask questions, receive feedback, and share their insights. Before the study, I introduced my theological foundations chapter, which focused on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit's role in church revitalization. I read several pages, and we later discussed its significance to the project. The Bible study title and scripture focus was "Empowered

to Witness" from Acts 1:4-8 and Acts 3:1-10. We focused on how Peter and John, who are recipients of the Holy Spirit, were empowered to be witnesses to the man lame begging at the temple gates. Just as the infilling of the Holy Spirit empowered them to be a witness, we took need the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to be effective in our witness. The teaching points for the Bible study on being "Empowered to Witness" were:

- Peter and John had a consistent prayer life (Acts 3:1).
- They were open to whom God placed in their path (Acts 3:2-3)
- They did not look away; they were intentionally engaging (Acts 3:4).
- They offered what they had, Jesus (Acts 3:6)
- They offered him help (Acts 3:7-8)

On Saturday of week six, several project participants witnessed through service at the local shelter. We served people from 8:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. We began morning prayer at the shelter before serving. Project participants served in welcoming and counting the number of guests, serving food, passing out care packages, and wiping down, cleaning, and sanitizing tables as guests left and others sat. Several of our participants were able to talk with the homeless guests, pray with them, and invite serval people to the church who attended worship on Sunday. This allowed the participants to put theory into practice. The group participants felt a sense of renewal (coming alive again) within themselves as they were able to serve and witness the guests of the homeless shelter. They felt a sense of joy, fulfillment, and gratitude as they participated in the spiritual practice of witness and service. Week six ended with our Sunday morning weekly check-in, during which we discussed the week's impact and any thoughts they had from the journaling they did this week.

Week Seven: Biblical Engagement/The Value of The Word

Week seven began with the Sunday morning service. This Sunday was important because one of our project participants and a context associate preached a sermon that focused on the third spiritual practice of what I called "Biblical Engagement," which involves the preaching, teaching, and reading of the word of God. This was significant because it allowed the participants to hear from another voice and get a unique perspective on the scriptures. This would also be the week that my cohort traveled to London for our fall mid-term intensive. The sermon title was "From the Mouth of God," and the scripture lesson was Isaiah 55:10-11. The sermon points were God's Word is not from this world (Is. 55:10-11); God's word is intentional (Jn. 6:33); and God's word will bring success (Jn 15:7-8). There was a slight change to the Monday morning prayer call. It was moved to a Monday evening Zoom prayer call on Monday, October 28th instead because of the Columbus Day holiday and to accommodate one of the professional associates (Dr. Jeff Williams) joining us to lead our reflection and prayer call.

Another one of the professional associates, the Reverend Dr. Bankole Akinbinu, would teach our Wednesday Bible study. The Bible study teaching continued to support the spiritual practice of biblical engagement. The title and scripture focus was "The Discipline of Bible Intake/Spiritual Reading. The scripture was 1 Timothy 4:7b-8. The key teaching points were biblical intake, forms of Bible intake, and practical steps for Bible intake and spiritual reading. Biblical intake focused on John 17:17 and Ephesians 6:17. Children of God grossly neglect Bible reading. The forms of Bible intake were hearing, reading, studying, memorizing, applying, and meditating on the Word of God. The practical steps for Bible Intake and spiritual reading were to carve out a time

every day for Bible intake, have a plan or reading schedule, read aloud, and practice meditating on one verse, phrase, or thought.

Week seven concluded with the Sunday morning group check-in and discussion of the week's events and how they impacted the project. Participants were encouraged to volunteer to open and close the session in prayer. I read, and we discussed the biblical foundations chapter and its significance to the project.

Week Eight: Biblical Engagement: The Value of The Word of God.

Week eight began with a change in the schedule. It was breast cancer awareness Sunday, and we had a guest speaker for that service. I decided to add a Sunday session to make up for this Sunday's breast cancer awareness Sunday. The session would be the following Sunday, and we continued the subject of biblical engagement for that Sunday.

Our Monday prayer call took on a slightly different approach as we moved it to a Monday evening Zoom call. The change accommodated one of the professional associates, Dr. Harry L. White, who led our devotion and prayer time for that Zoom call. Dr. White shared the devotional scripture, Acts 8:26-40, which looked at Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch. He encouraged us to be a Philip in the lives of others who need someone to help them grow in their understanding of God through the scriptures. For us to help, we need to grow in our reading and understanding of the scriptures.

Our week eight Wednesday Bible study was led by a guest speaker, Pastor Wille Harris. We continued about biblical engagement and the “Value of The Word of God.” The sermon title was “The Sufficiency of Scripture.” The reading was 2 Timothy 3:16-17. We closed the eighth week with the Sunday morning check-in and summary of the

events for that week. I had an opportunity to read along with the project group some excerpts from my interdisciplinary foundation's chapter on change theory and organizational change.

Week Nine - Make up Week

On Monday, we held our Zoom prayer call to allow another professional associate, Dr. Jeffrey Williams, to share reflections and prayer with the group. This prayer call replaced the prayer call we rescheduled due to the Columbus Day holiday. Dr. Williams continued on the subject of biblical engagement, "The Value of the Word of God." Dr. William's title was "Understanding the World of God and Its Authority." His reflection points were the significance of submission to the word for spiritual authority; the need for revelation in understanding the word of God, and the importance of having a relationship with the word (Jesus) beyond just knowledge.

On Wednesday of the week, the subject of biblical engagement, "The Value of the Word of God." The title was "Abiding in the Word." The scripture lesson was John 8:31-32; 15:7-10. When we Abide in God's Word, we can ask in confidence and receive in confidence (Jn. 15:7); we show and experience God's love (Jn. 15:10); and we experience God's joy (Jn. 15:11). The keys factors to abiding in the word requires a hunger for the word (Matt. 5:6), being available for the word (Lk. 10:41-42), discipline from distractions (1 Cor. 6:12), and obedience to the word.

I also read to the project group from my historical foundation chapter on William Seymore, the Azusa Street Revival, and the Pentecostal movement and how they

experienced spiritual renewal. The following week, post-questionnaires were collected, and exit interviews were held with the participants.

Summary of Learnings

There were sixteen diverse participants in the project, which were all members of Christ Family Church. These project participants served in various areas and roles in the church. The ministry roles were made up of persons that served as elders, ministers, deacons, greeters, security, media ministry, children's church, musicians, and Chief Executive Director. The length of membership ranged from one year to twenty-five years. The group comprised eleven women and five men aged thirty to sixty-five years old (6.67% were aged twenty-five to thirty-four years, 6.67% were aged thirty-five to forty-four, 26.6% were aged forty-five to fifty-four, and 13.33% were aged sixty-five). This was helpful because it gave us a diverse group that spanned different generations, ages, cultures, and genders, which would help provide us with different perspectives. The educational backgrounds stemmed from high school graduates to post-graduate school. The diversity of the group would help to give the project a true representation of the context, Christ Family Church

Pre-Questionnaire

The pre-questionnaires were designed to gauge and capture data on where individual members were spiritually and where they felt the church was spiritual. It was designed to see if they felt their lives, or the church may have become spiritually stagnant in some way and need renewal. Gathering data and gaining insight from these responses

before and after the project would allow me to see where the church is realistically engaged and whether the method used to bring about spiritual renewal was effective or ineffective.

Are you growing spiritually, or are you stagnant?

This question was designed to gauge the participants' spiritual state. Eleven of the thirteen participants said that they were growing spiritually, and two said that they were stagnant. Three of the fourteen who said they were growing spiritually stated that they would like to grow more and at a quicker pace.

Are you in need of spiritual renewal?

This question was designed to prove my point that the church's membership has become stagnant and needs spiritual renewal, which can revitalize the church. Of the fourteen participants, eleven (11) said they needed spiritual renewal, and three (3) felt they were fine and did not need spiritual renewal. This gives us an indication that the project is on the right track and that the project group needs spiritual renewal.

How often do you pray (very often, often, not often, never)?

This question was asked because we believe that the spiritual practice of prayer leads to spiritual renewal. Therefore, we want to see participants with their prayer life now and if the project will help increase the practice of prayer. Of the fourteen participants, six (6) said they pray very often, five (5) said often, two (2) said not often,

and one skipped the question. Most of the group said they pray very often, which tells us that stagnation in their prayer life is not a main issue.

How often do you attend church prayer gatherings (very often, often, not often)?

This question allows us to see if the project participants, which is a sample size of the church, participate in prayer which is critical to the church moving from stagnation to renewal. Praying together as a group was part of the spiritual practices/methods used to influence spiritual renewal, so seeing how the ground felt before and after the eight-week intensive was good. Out of the fourteen (14) participants, nine (9) participants attended church prayer gatherings very often, three attended often, and two (2) not often.

How often do you read your bible (often, not often/Daily, not daily)?

This question was critical because one of the spiritual practices and methods used to effect stagnation and encourage spiritual renewal is Bible engagement, which includes reading scripture. This question allowed us to get a baseline of how regularly the participants read scripture before entering the intensive. This would allow us to gauge the project's effectiveness once we were done. Of the fourteen participants, twelve said they read the Bible often or daily, and two said they do not read the Bible often.

How often do you attend Bible study (often, not often)?

This question was asked because biblical engagement (hearing and reading) the word of God is one of the spiritual practices that we felt influences spiritual renewal, so if the participants were or were not attending Bible study, it would give us an indication of

whether they were already experiencing spiritual renewal. Of the fourteen participants, thirteen said they attend Bible study often, and one said they do not attend often. This may be an indication that the group may not need to experience renewal in biblical engagement. From the numbers, the group feels they are fine when it comes to this area.

How often do you attend Sunday morning worship (often, not often)?

This question again helped us determine whether their attendance at Sunday morning worship and the Sunday morning worship service played any part in their spiritual renewal. If they responded by saying they attend often but also said they felt stagnant, then there may be an issue with the effectiveness of Sunday morning worship. Therefore, we would need to evaluate the effectiveness of worship, liturgy, preaching, etc. Of the fourteen participants, all fourteen said they attended Sunday worship often/weekly.

Do you participate in any service projects outside of the church?

This question gave us an idea if the participants were motivated to serve others. Often, a lack of service (witness) to others outside of the church indicates a stagnant church in need of revitalization. One of the spiritual practices we use to influence spiritual renewal is service or witness through service to others outside of the church. Of the fourteen participants we asked if they participated in service outside of the church, all ten responded yes, and four responded no that they do not serve outside of the church.

Do you feel your church has become spiritually stagnant in any way?

This allows us to evaluate how participants view the spiritual climate of the church before the project intensive. This is an important question because our main focus of the project intensive is to see if spiritual practices can influence and bring about renewal. Of the fourteen participants, seven said yes, the church needs renewal, five said no, the church is not stagnant, and two did not respond.

Do you feel your church needs revitalization (renewal)?

This question gets to the heart of the project: spiritual renewal leading to church revitalization. The responses confirmed that my problem statement is correct: The church has become stagnant and needs spiritual renewal. Of the fourteen participants, ten (10) said, "Yes, we need revitalization," and four (4) said No".

Post-Test Questionnaire/Survey

At the culmination of the eight-week project, the participants were given a post-test questionnaire/survey to ascertain the effectiveness of the spiritual renewal intensive and to measure the validity of the project's hypothesis. The post-surveys helped provide some of the necessary data needed to conclude that there was an increase in awareness of the need for spiritual renewal. Based on the overall results of the post-surveys, participants confirmed that spiritual renewal was needed and that the spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement, and service played an important part in their experiencing renewal. The following post-test survey results evidenced several conclusions.

After the eight-week spiritual renewal intensive, has your awareness and desire for spiritual renewal increased?

The results of this question concerning a greater awareness and desire for spiritual renewal were encouraging because it proved that the methods (spiritual practices) used accomplished the intended purpose of influencing spiritual renewal in the lives of the participants. Of the fourteen participants, fourteen, 100% responded that their awareness and desire for spiritual renewal increased after the 8-week intensive.

After participating in the spiritual renewal intensive, do you feel you have grown spiritually?

Of fourteen participants, fourteen, 100% percent responded that they have grown spiritually since participating in the spiritual renewal intensive. When compared to the pre-survey question of whether they are growing spiritually or stagnant. Of the fourteen participants, two said they were not growing spiritually. They were stagnant spiritually. By the end of the eight-week spiritual renewal intensive all fourteen participants felt they were growing spiritually. The two participants had gone from being stagnant spiritually to growing spiritually.

Have you prayed more since starting the spiritual renewal intensive?

Of the fourteen participants, eleven, 78.57 percent of participants said yes, they prayed more since starting the intensive. Three, 21.43 percent of participants said they somewhat pray. This was another increase in the personal prayer time because, in the pre-survey one person had skipped the question altogether. But they at least said that they are

somewhat praying. This may have meant that the prayer times that we had may have helped this person. One participant mentioned how, because of the morning prayer calls they decided to develop a daily time of prayer.

Have you attended church more since starting the spiritual renewal intensive?

Of the fourteen participants, eleven, 78.57 percent said they attended more, and three 21.43 percent, said no. This result was surprising because in the pre-survey all fourteen participants said they attended church often (weekly). So, we saw a slight drop from two participants to three participants.

Have you read your Bible more since participating in the project?

Of the fourteen participants, thirteen, or 92.86 percent, said yes, and just one, or 7.14 percent, said, "I hope to read more." Bible reading after the intensive increased compared to the pre-survey, when twelve participants said they read their Bible often and two did not. This validates that the spiritual practice of biblical engagement during the intensive may have helped bring spiritual renewal to the participants.

Will you attend Bible study more after completing the spiritual renewal intensive?

Of the fourteen participants, twelve, 85.71 %, said yes, they would attend Bible study more. One, 7.14%, said no, they have not attended more, and one, 7.14%, said they hope to attend more. The survey showed that thirteen participants said they attended Bible study often, and one said they did not attend often.

How likely are you to serve in outreach opportunities after completing the intensive?

Of fourteen participants ten, 71.43 percent said they would very likely participate in service/outreach opportunities, and four, 28.57 percent, said they would likely participate in service/outreach opportunities. This was good because we used to service and witness during the project as spiritual practices to influence spiritual renewal. After completing the intensive, we can see that more individuals intended to be more intentional about service to others.

Did the Sunday morning sermons help you to experience renewal?

Of fourteen participants, thirteen, 92.86 percent, said yes, the Sunday morning sermons helped them experience renewal, and one, 7.14 percent, said they were unsure. The high percentage of this response was helpful because biblical engagement, which involves preaching, is one of the spiritual practices we use to influence spiritual renewal.

Did the Wednesday interactive bible study discussions help you to experience spiritual renewal?

Of the fourteen participants, thirteen, 92.86 percent, said yes, and one, or 7.14 percent, said they were not sure. This was a good result because it supports the fact that the spiritual practice of biblical engagement through Bible teaching and discussion helps bring about spiritual renewal.

Which spiritual practice impacted your spiritual renewal the most?

Out of fourteen participants four, 28.57 percent said Sunday and Wednesday sermons; five, 35.71 percent said the 28-day dynamite prayer devotional; one (1), 7.14

percent said the witness and invite cards challenge; and four (4), 28.57 percent said the early morning group in person weekly recaps on Sunday. No participants said the Monday morning prayer calls and no one said the service/outreach opportunities. It looks like the daily devotional reading and prayer was very effective. I could tell each week during our weekly summary sessions because the participants would often refer to the devotional reading that they were doing that week. The devotional reading was also one of the spiritual practices we used to bring about renewal. This question was critical because it revealed that the impact of this project on spiritual renewal came primarily from the spiritual practices of the daily devotional readings, the Sunday morning sermons and Wednesday interactive Bible study, the Sunday morning group recap sessions, and finally the witness and invite card challenge. The overall response to the post-surveys was insightful as the participants' responses seemed quite different after the project was completed. You could tell that a change in the direction of spiritual renewal took place from the initial pre-survey responses to the post-survey responses.

Journal Summary Responses

While the pre- and post-survey responses were helpful and insightful, the journal entries also gave us some detailed insight into the participants' thoughts regarding the methods used to bring about spiritual renewal and the overall effectiveness of the project. Journal questions were also provided to help guide the journaling and keep it focused on the week's events. The participants were asked to journal freely and honestly about the week’s events each week.

Week One Journal Entry Summary Responses

The journaling theme for week one was spiritual renewal and our awareness of the need for it. After the week's teaching, prayer calls, and discussion, one of the journal questions that guided our journaling was: Why do we need to be renewed spiritually?

Participant One said, "If I am honest, I do not remember the time I went to God specifically with the request to check my heart. But after this teaching, it is important to do more spiritual renewal updates/checkups."

Participant Two said, "There is an energy within this group that supersedes what we get on the corporate level. I am trying to understand it. We are all genuinely excited because we really do want spiritual renewal, and we get to engage directly with our leader. We need to be spiritually renewed because we live in a world where sin is always present."

Participant Ten said, "We had a rich discussion today, which concluded Sunday of week one. One thing that stood out to me was that the whole group had a hunger and thirst for more of Jesus." The group was excited to embark on this eight-week journey of spiritual renewal. The journal revealed that several of the participants became aware of their need for spiritual renewal.

Week Two Journal Summary

In week two much of the participant's journaling focused on prayer and its role and effect on them experiencing spiritual renewal. One of the journal questions asked was. "How are the prayer calls/daily devotions impacting you"?

Participant Two said the renewal group has caused me to be more mindful of praying first. I notice that I begin praying immediately when something does not feel right. I also noticed that my husband has been praying more and using the holy oil, which has also impacted me. The increased prayer has also changed. our house."

Participant One, said "I plan to infuse prayer time into my daily schedule as a non-negotiable time block." The morning prayers are great! I feel like I am starting my weekend off on the right foot.

Participant Eight said, "one of the most significant revelations for me has been the importance of making prayer my number one priority, regardless of the challenges I face or the valleys I pass through. I have known prayer was essential, but this week has reinforced that it should be my first response."

The journaling in week two reinforced that the spiritual practice of prayer effectively influenced spiritual renewal in the participants. The teachings on prayer, the morning prayer calls, and the opportunities provided for various prayer times were impactful.

Week Three Journal Summary Responses

In week three's journaling, the participants spoke of the numerous ways that they are experiencing renewal. Some spoke of prayer, some the daily devotional book, but many spoke of how the smaller interactive group sessions were the most helpful. One of the journal questions we asked the group was, "Are the smaller interactive sessions more effective than the larger corporate teaching sessions?"

Participant Twelve said, “So far, the small group interactive sessions are what I like the best. Though I do not say much, the ones sharing their thoughts are in line with what I have had thoughts about, too. We all recognize that our relationship with the father is vital.”

Participant One said the smaller, interactive settings are the cheat code for this whole thing. To me, the larger corporate gatherings provide a greater emotional jolt. However, when it comes to spiritual renewal, the smaller sessions allow us to go beyond feelings and learn more in-depth about God’s will. The impact of the smaller sessions comes from excavating what was taught in the corporate session.

The group shared with me early on that they enjoyed and learned at a deeper level during the smaller interactive sessions. The smaller interactive sessions were interactive; they allowed participants to ask questions, get answers, and share their thoughts.

Week Four Journal Summary Responses

In week four, the group journaled various thoughts on their spiritual growth and confidence in being witnesses to and serving others. One of the journal questions we asked was, as we enter week four, do you feel you have been growing spiritually since starting these spiritual renewal sessions, or has nothing changed?

Participant Six said, “Yes, I feel like I am growing more spiritually. The preaching, teaching, prayers, biblical engagement, witnessing, mediation, and worship have changed me to a level of understanding even greater in my Christian Walk.

Participant Seven said, “Absolutely, I am growing spiritually since starting these renewal sessions.” Participant Four said, “After four weeks of these renewal sessions, I

can feel myself growing spiritually. My consistency in my prayer life and devotions has improved. I can feel my relationship growing stronger the more often I pray.

By week four, as witnessed by the journal responses, we could begin to see signs that the participants were beginning to experience spiritual renewal. This was exciting because we were on the road to proving our hypothesis. These spiritual practices, when practiced, would lead to spiritual renewal which can lead to church revitalization.

Week Five Journal Summary Responses

In week five, journaling focused on service to others and witnessing to God. A good percentage of journaling also focused on the Dynamite Prayer Twenty-Eight-day daily devotionals. One of the questions asked to the participants in week five was, "How did Sunday and Wednesday's teaching on witnessing challenge your faith? What did you hear God say to you?"

Participant Five said, "The teachings from Sunday and Wednesday have significantly impacted me. I truly felt God speaking to my heart, urging me to be intentional about witnessing.

Participant Four said, "This week's teachings on witnessing challenged my faith. I learned that real change begins with the people of the church, and as church people, we have to get out of our Christian bubbles and go outside the four walls of the church."

Week Six Journal Summary Responses

The group's journaling during week six seemed energized. Most of the journaling focused on their excitement about encouraging and sharing Christ with others. One of the

journal questions asked, “What are your thoughts on the role of the Holy Spirit in experiencing spiritual renewal?”

Participant One said, “The Holy Spirit's involvement is a prerequisite to spiritual renewal. Without the Holy Spirit, we can run on adrenaline and motivation. Our willpower can only take us so but so far, but through the power of the Holy Spirit, we can get supernatural strength to pray when we do not feel like it, witness when we don’t feel like it, read our Bible when we don’t feel like it.”

Participant Eight said, “During the Wednesday reading of Pastor Wilson’s theological chapter on the Holy Spirit, I was particularly struck by the concept of revitalization and the framework for achieving spiritual renewal. Holy Spirit in experiencing spiritual renewal is becoming clearer to me.”

The teaching that week centered on service and witness. We also discussed the role of the Holy Spirit in experiencing spiritual renewal. I read and shared several excerpts from my theological foundation's chapter on the role of the Holy Spirit in our witness and service to others. The group's journaling responses indicated that they felt and experienced the Holy Spirit's presence in those sessions that week. Something was happening in and to the group that week!

Week Seven Journal Summary Responses

Journaling in week seven included several events but primarily focused on biblical engagement and the value of God's word. Biblical engagement (preaching, teaching, reading) was one of the spiritual practices that led the participants to experience spiritual renewal.

Participant Seven said, “We cannot have spiritual renewal without God’s word. Jesus is the word made manifest. Oftentimes, we, as Christians, try to live life without God’s word and without God’s Spirit and wonder why we struggle.”

Participant Eight said, “Wednesday night also had a significant impact on me! I received a strong message about the importance of the word of God and cultivating a desire for it, which resonates with the concept of spiritual renewal. The insight that the more we read, the greater our appetite for His Word becomes was particularly encouraging, reinforcing the importance of daily engagement with scripture.”

Week Eight Journal Summary Responses

Journaling in week eight continued to focus on biblical engagement and the value of God's word. Participants also shared their thoughts on this subject as they heard from several project professionals. Participants seemed to have felt the project’s purpose accomplished, and they identified a clear change from when they started the project to the final week. A large consensus felt that spiritual renewal had taken place through the various methods used.

Participant Seven said, “The different speakers and their messages were highly effective in impacting me. The Holy Spirit arranged the speakers to introduce the topic of Biblical engagement and then go deeper with each speaker.”

Participant Two said, “This experience has been amazing! I am sad that it must end, but I am also excited because it feels like the beginning of something, too. I can feel it, and I know the rest of my Spiritual Renewal classmates can feel it, too.

Exit Interview Summary Responses.

The exit interview was designed to get the overall concluding thoughts from the project participants and to gather data on the project's effectiveness through the lens of the project group participants. We used several exit questions for the exit interview.

How effective do you think the project intensive was at bringing you to a place of awareness of needing spiritual renewal?

Of fifteen participants, fifteen (100%) said that the project was very effective. This question and response were critical in helping to determine the effectiveness of the project.

Which spiritual practice was most effective in experiencing spiritual renewal?

Of the fifteen participants, seven said the Dynamite Prayer daily devotionals were the most effective, four said the Sunday Sermons and Wednesday Bible studies were the most effective, and four said the weekly interactive group check-ins were the most effective. This was helpful insight because it showed that the methods we chose to bring about spiritual renewal were effective.

On a scale of one through three, do you think a spiritual renewal project like this can bring about renewal in the church? One—strongly agree, two—somewhat agree, three—do not agree.

Of the fifteen participants, fourteen said yes, a spiritual renewal project like this can bring about revitalization to the church. One said somewhat because they felt the

members would have to make a commitment to the spiritual practices and length of the project. The exit interviews were insightful as many other insights that would be helpful for a future renewal project were also discussed. Participants shared that for the future of the church, interactive small groups, prayer, and daily devotional readings would be a wonderful way to continue the spiritual renewal that has started with this project group.

Conclusion

It was in week four in our Sunday morning check-in discussion session that I could sense the tide turning toward renewal. The light bulb had come on for the group. As we began conversing about that week's events and learnings, you could sense there was a sense of excitement, cohesiveness, and hunger to be and do more. The group was experiencing spiritual renewal. Some testimonies came from group members that morning, sharing how the sermons, Bible studies, and the daily bible devotionals were igniting a fresh desire for more spirituality. The first signs of renewal were taking place!

One participant, with great conviction and passion, said, “I feel like we are cheating the rest of the congregation.” I feel like what we are doing and experiencing should be shared with the whole church. The whole church should be taken through this process, these sessions.” The rest of the group chimed in, yes, we agree. Something like this needs to happen to the whole church. I discerned at that moment that what was taking place at that point was spiritual renewal. I thought to myself, this is exactly what this project was designed to do. Create an awareness and desire to experience spiritual renewal change, a coming journal question that was being answered before my very eyes. If a church that has become stagnant or plateaued spiritually, participates in an eight-

week spiritual renewal intensive by participating in the spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement, and service (witness) they will begin to experience spiritual renewal which can affect the whole church and bring about revitalization (a coming alive again)!

After four weeks, a group that began in week one desiring spiritual renewal began to experience what they desired. Several individuals stated that they were stagnant or had plateaued in their personal relationship with Jesus Christ and needed to be renewed. The post-questionaries showed that by the end of the project, this group was different spiritually.

This research and project attempted to equip, educate, and encourage leaders to help move their church from a place of stagnation to movement—from a place of spiritual plateauing to a place of coming alive again.

Each foundational chapter provided biblical and practical insights to build a foundation for a spiritual renewal project that could help leaders, churches, and ministries move the ministry from stagnation to renewal! The responses from the pre- and post-surveys, and exit interviews were critical to proving the project's hypothesis and the effectiveness of the methods used to achieve spiritual renewal. The spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement (preaching, teaching, devotionals), and service (witness/outreach) were invaluable tools that were used to accomplish renewal in the project participants.

Can these bones live? This is the question God asked Ezekiel, and it is the question of the moment. It surrounds and supports the subject of church revitalization and renewal! Ezekiel's answer is, "Lord God, only You know" (Ez.37:3). God's answer to

Ezekiel concerning these dry bones is yes, these bones can live! God's yes to Ezekiel is also a yes for today's church, which is revitalized.

This is the same question and answer that we started with at the beginning of this doctoral journey with the biblical foundations chapter. Now after several research chapters, project proposals, IRB submissions, an eight-week project with pre-post and exit interviews and analysis. We conclude and concur with the scriptures that dry bones can live! God is for hearing vitalization (a coming alive again). God can cause a stagnant, plateaued, dead church to experience spiritual renewal and come alive again!
One of the participants (#14) said to me in their exit interview.

"This project came full circle. God desires for us (the church) to experience renewal. You shared with us the foundational scripture and basis for spiritual renewal in Ezekiel 37:1-14 and shared how God would, by his Spirit, initiate renewal with a vision given to a leader (Ezekiel), and that leader would take that vision and speak/prophesy God's word to a people and God by God's Spirit would do the work and breath life back into them and the dry bones that were once death would come alive again. That is what I feel has happened in this program to me. God has allowed me to be renewed." I responded and said to her you got it. You just explained my whole hypothesis. You just captured the goal of the project.

In conclusion, I do believe that if individuals participate in the spiritual practices of prayer, biblical engagement, and service (witness/evangelism), they will experience renewal. And if they experience renewal individually, it could cause the whole church to experience revitalization (coming alive again). This renewal must originate with God, visionary leadership, and willing Christians. Yes, these dry bones can live!

APPENDIX A

PROJECT AGENDA

Week One/Session One: Reception and Overview of Revitalization Intense Bootcamp

- Meet in person with the twelve small group participants and the congregation.
- Describe the purpose of the Revitalization Intensive
- Outline the eight-week journey and establish the commitment guidelines for accountability.
- Monday Manna online prayer call or Zoom (30 minutes)
- Wednesday in-person prayer and Bible study on "True Discipleship" (45 minutes)
- Administer pre-revitalization Intensive Boot Camp surveys.
- Sunday morning check-in with a small group (30 minutes)

Week Two/Session Two: (The Importance and Power of Prayer)

- Sunday Moring Worship (Sermon: The Importance and Power of Prayer sermon)
- Monday Moring Manna prayer call
- Wednesday in-person prayer and Bible study (The Importance and Power of Prayer II!)
- Participants lead in prayer.
- Sunday weekly check-in with the twelve (small group)
- Professional associate's check-in

Week Three/Session Three: (The Importance and Power of the Word of God)

- Sunday morning worship (The Importance and Power of Prayer III)
- Monday morning manna prayer call

- Wednesday in-person prayer and Bible study (The Importance and Power of Prayer, IV).
- Participants lead in prayer.
- Sunday weekly check-in with the 12 (small group)

Week Four/Session Four: (The Importance and Power of the Word of God)

- Sunday morning worship (Sermon: The Importance and Power of the Word of God)
- Monday morning manna prayer call
- Wednesday in-person prayer and Bible study (The Importance and Power of The Word of God, II).
- Participants lead in prayer.
- Sunday weekly check-in with the twelve (small group)

Week Five/Session Five: (The Importance and Power of the Word of God)

- Sunday morning worship (The Importance and Power of the Word of God, III)
- Monday morning manna prayer call
- Wednesday in-person bible study (The Importance and Power of the Word of God IV).
- Participants lead in prayer.
- Professional associate's check-in
- Sunday weekly check-in with the twelve (small group)

Week Six/Session Six: (The Importance and Power of Being a Witness for Christ/Service)

- Sunday morning worship (Be A Witness!)
- Monday morning manna prayer call
- Wednesday in-person prayer and Bible study (Be A Witness, II)
- Participants lead in prayer.
- Sunday weekly check-in with the twelve (small group)

Week Seven/Session Seven (The Importance and Power of Being a Witness for Christ).

- Sunday morning worship (Be A Witness, III)
- Monday morning manna prayer call
- Wednesday in-person prayer and Bible study (Be A Witness, IV)
- Participants lead in prayer.
- Sunday weekly check-in with the twelve (small group).

Week Eight: (Final Interviews and Assessments).

- Conduct closing interviews/assessments with each participant in the designated test group of twelve.
- Administer post-revitalization boot camp questionnaires/surveys to assess if the boot camp made any impact and change.
- Professional associates check in and discuss findings and results.

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